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ABSTRACT

This self-study training manual for parents of children with autism contains nine modules on behavior modification techniques. The modules address: (1) the ABC's of behavior, which discusses discriminating among words that describe feelings and words that describe behaviors, identifying examples of learned behavior, and defining and identifying examples of antecedents, behaviors, and consequences; (2) teaching the child to follow directions, which discusses reasons children do not follow directions, ways to make difficult directions easier for children to follow, what to do when a child follows a direction and what to do when a child does not; (3) an introduction to reinforcement, which describes kinds of reinforcement and the necessity of catching a child being good; (4) how to use reinforcement with the child; (5) planning activities to increase appropriate behavior, which describes activities that are enjoyable and appropriate, anticipating problems during activities, and establishing reinforcement plans; (6) responding to undesirable behaviors and deciding which strategy to use; (7) deciding what to teach the child and breaking the skill down into steps; (8) teaching your child new skills and the hierarchy of prompts; and (9) encouraging the child to communicate. (CR)

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PARENT SKILL TRAINING

(SELF-STUDY MODULES)

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THE LEAP OUTREACH PROJECT

Providing training & technical assistance to meet the educational needs of young children with autism since 1981.

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LEAP PRESCHOOL

PARENT SKILL TRAINING PROGRAM

MODULE #1: The ABC's of Behavior

Main Ideas

- Definition of Behavior
- Discrimination Between Words that Describe Feelings and Words that Describe Behaviors
- Identification of Examples of Learned Behavior
- Defining and Identifying Examples of Antecedents, Behaviors, and Consequences

DEFINING BEHAVIOR

Before we can talk about a child's behavior, we need to identify what we mean by the word "behavior." Behavior refers to a specific action that a person does that can be observed. Just about everything we do can be described as a behavior. Turning the alarm clock off in the morning, brushing your teeth, making breakfast, and starting your car are examples of behaviors. Similarly with children, playing with toys, getting dressed, eating breakfast, and talking are all examples of behavior.

FEELINGS VERSUS BEHAVIORS

Good
Disruptive
Cooperative
Hyperactive
Aggressive

Often, when describing a child's behavior, we use words such as the ones listed above. For example, a teacher may speak of a student in her class and say, "she's very good," or a teacher may report to a parent that his son "can be very disruptive." The problem with these statements is that they do not tell us specifically what the child is doing. For example, when a parent says that her child is "usually good," what does that mean? It may mean that the child puts her toys away when asked or that she eats everything on her plate. The same is true when a teacher tells a parent that his child can be "very disruptive." Again, what does this mean? It may mean that the child throws toys, makes loud noises, and runs around the room. On the other hand, it could mean that the child does not listen to the teacher and distracts his friends by making faces.

Words such as these listed above often mean different things to different people. For example, a child may behave the same way with two people, but each person may describe the child's behavior differently. One person may describe the child's behavior by saying "she's active but it's not a problem," while the other person may report that the child is "hyperactive and unmanageable." Both of these descriptions communicate each person's feelings about the child's behavior, but they do not tell us what the child is actually doing.

Let's see if you can identify the difference between words that describe feeling and words that describe behavior:

Helpful
Cries
Sits Down
Stubborn
Yawns
Lazy
Taps Pencil
Bad
Pleasant
Combs Hair

One way to avoid using words such as "good" and "disruptive," which describe feelings, is to be specific when you talk about the child's behavior. When we describe behaviors specifically, we can more clearly communicate what a child is actually doing. The following is an exchange between a mother and her child's teacher:

Mother: "J.J.'s been very bad at home. Is he bad in the classroom?"
Teacher: "Oh, no. J.J. is usually good."
Mother: "Really? He's being good?"
Teacher: "Sure. Well, he's disruptive every once in a while, but not often."

How much do you feel you know about what J.J. is doing in the classroom? This mother and teacher were using words that describe their feelings about J.J.'s behavior. It is difficult to get a clear picture of what is happening in the classroom. Now read the exchange between the same mother and teacher when they use words that describe behavior more specifically:

Mother: "J.J.'s been hitting his brother a lot at home. Does he hit the other children in the classroom?"

Teacher: "Well J.J. hit another child three times last week. But this week he hasn't hit anyone."

Mother: "Are there other behaviors you are worried about at school?"

Teacher: "Yes there is one more thing. He often screams 'No' and runs away from me when I ask him to clean up."

One other way to illustrate the difference between feelings and behaviors is to think about a person you feel is "nervous." We may not all agree that a person is "nervous." "Nervous" is a word that describes our feelings about a person's behavior. We usually, however, associate the word "nervous" with certain actions that we can observe -- for instance, nail biting, pacing the floor, or wringing hands. These activities represent behaviors we can observe and agree upon.

Let's see if we can change some words that describe feelings into words that describe specific behaviors. Read this sentence: "Jeffrey is the class clown." You could restate this, describing specific behaviors by saying, "Jeffrey tells jokes during class and makes faces to distract other children."

Here is another sentence which reflects someone's feelings about a child's behavior: "Tanya is a little angel." Can you restate this sentence into a specific statement that describes a behavior? (ANSWER: Tanya plays quietly and cleans up her toys when she is finished, or Tanya shares her toys with other children in the classroom).

It will be helpful when you talk to students' parents or other teachers and professionals to clearly describe the behaviors you would like to discuss. Also, if someone is reporting to you about something a child has done and is unclear or not specific enough, ask them to clarify what they are describing.

LEARNED BEHAVIOR

Look at the following list of words:

blinking
using a spoon
talking
sneezing
shivering
dressing
breathing
driving a car
coughing
making a telephone call

These words are all examples of behaviors -- actions that can be observed. However, some of these are reflexes, or behaviors that our bodies do naturally, and some are behaviors that we learn at some time in our lives.

Most of the behaviors that we do each day are learned behaviors. Examples of learned behaviors that you may have done today include shutting off your alarm clock, getting out of bed, brushing your teeth, and having a cup of coffee. The children in your classroom have probably demonstrated many learned behaviors today. These might include: playing with toys, eating snacks, taking their coats off, and talking to others. Which of the aforementioned behaviors are learned versus reflexive?

LEARNING SOCIAL BEHAVIORS

Just as children learn how to color, put together puzzles, and count, they also learn a variety of social behaviors. They learn behaviors such as how to walk quietly in a supermarket, how to share toys, and how to say "please" and "thank you." Children also learn many undesirable behaviors, such as whining, hitting, and not doing what is asked of them. When we say that a child has learned these behaviors this does not mean that someone intentionally taught the child an undesirable behavior. What it does mean is that situations that occur before and after a behavior may, without our realizing it, have an effect on whether or not the child continues the behavior in the future.

HOW BEHAVIORS ARE LEARNED: ANTECEDENTS

If we say that children learn the majority of their behaviors, you may be wondering how all this learning occurs. When children are very young, much learning occurs through observations and interactions with parents. For example, many toddlers learn to say "bye-bye" by hearing their parents say "goodbye" when someone is leaving. The parents will also encourage the child by saying, "Say bye-bye."

In this example, saying "bye-bye" does not occur by itself. It happens in response to a specific situation -- typically, when someone is leaving and the parent tells the child to say "bye-bye." Rarely do you hear a toddler just randomly saying "bye-bye." This is true for all behaviors. They occur in response to a situation.

The word antecedent is used to refer to the situation that comes before a behavior. An antecedent can be any object, person, or event in the environment that cues a person to do something. For example, the antecedent to a child dressing himself may be having his clothes put out where he can reach them. Or, the antecedent to a child signing for "cookie" may be the parent asking the child if she wants a cookie. Two antecedents for going grocery shopping may be an absence of certain food items and having some form of payment for purchases.

Because they will often cue a particular behavior, antecedents play an important role in determining behaviors. Antecedents set the stage for a behavior to occur. For example, if a child has been told he cannot have a cookie, he is less likely to "sneak" a cookie if the parent is standing in the kitchen. This behavior would be more likely to happen if the parent was out of the room. In this example, the parent's absence would be the antecedent to cue the behavior of taking a cookie. Similarly, a person is not likely to drive through a red light if the car following her happens to be a police car. If however, the antecedent is that it is late at night and there are no other cars in sight, this may be a cue to drive through the red light. In the following statements, identify the antecedent of the behavior:

1. Becky begins to cry when Greg takes her toy.
2. Robert throws his toys around the room when his teacher talks to other adults.
3. Dennis gives his teacher a hug when he walks into the room.

(ANSWERS:
1. Antecedent: Greg takes Becky's toy. Behavior: Becky cries.
2. Antecedent: Teacher talks to adults. Behavior: Robert throws toys.
3. Antecedent: Dennis arrives at school. Behavior: Dennis gives teacher a hug.

HOW BEHAVIORS ARE LEARNED: CONSEQUENCES

In addition to antecedents, what occurs after a behavior is very important. The word consequence refers to what happens immediately after the behavior. Some consequences happen naturally like getting burned if you touch a hot stove or slipping when you walk on ice.

Sometimes a person responds to a behavior in a certain way. These consequences are learned responses. At some time in our lives we learned how to respond in these ways, whether through imitation or direct instruction. A child in school raises his hand and the teacher calls on him. A child forgets to clean up her toys and her teacher scolds her. Your mother comes for a visit and you give her a hug. Someone says "Hello" to you and you shake his hand.

A behavior may also be followed by a consequence that has been planned by another person. For example, a father gives his son an M&M each time he uses the potty or a policeman gives a ticket to someone that is speeding. In other words someone plans a certain consequence in an attempt to have an effect on whether the behavior continues.

Let's try to determine what both the antecedents and the consequences are in each of the following situations:

a) Jennifer cries when her mother puts her in bed. She insists on sleeping with her mother. Her mother is exhausted and does not feel like listening to her scream for an hour. She lets Jennifer sleep with her. (ANSWER: **A**ntecedent: Mother puts Jennifer to bed. **B**ehavior: Jennifer cries. **C**onsequence: Mother lets Jennifer sleep with her.)

b) Mrs. Jones is trying to toilet train her two year old daughter, Tamara. She sits Tamara down on the potty chair and says, "Go potty." After a few minutes, Tamara urinates in the potty. Mrs. Jones kisses Tamara and says, "That's a good girl, you went potty." (ANSWER: **A**ntecedent: Mrs. Jones sits Tamara on the potty. **B**ehavior: Tamara urinates in the potty. **C**onsequence: Mrs. Jones kisses and praises Tamara.

c) Before he leaves every day, Bryan asks his teacher if he can take home a toy from the classroom. His teacher says no. Bryan begins to cry. His teacher ignores his crying and leads him toward his mother (who has come to pick him up). (ANSWER: **A**ntecedent: Teacher says "NO". **B**ehavior: Bryan cries. **C**onsequence: Teacher ignores Bryan's crying.

This important sequence of events -- antecedent, behavior, consequence -- can be shortened to the "ABC's of behavior." It is through this chain of events that children learn. Looking at this chain of events will help us determine what will happen with a specific behavior in the future.

USING CONSEQUENCES TO PREDICT BEHAVIOR

The type of consequence that follows a behavior will determine if the behavior will occur more frequently or less frequently in the future. Consequences can therefore be use to predict the future occurrence of a behavior. In general, consequences that are pleasant or rewarding result in the behavior occurring more often, while consequences that are unpleasant or punishing result in the behavior occurring less frequently.

Read over the three examples again on page 7 and determine 1) whether or not the consequence of the behavior is pleasant or unpleasant, and 2) make a future prediction about the future occurrence of the behavior.

a) Type of Consequence: Pleasant and rewarding. Prediction: Behavior will occur more often.

b) Type of Consequence: Pleasant and rewarding. Prediction: Behavior will occur more often.

c) Type of Consequence: Unpleasant or punishing. Prediction: Behavior will occur less frequently.

Although this seems simple with these examples, it is sometimes difficult to break a behavior down in this way. It is especially difficult if it is unclear what the antecedent to a behavior is or if you are not sure if the consequence is pleasant or unpleasant to the child. If you want to try to change a child's behavior, however, you will be more successful if you carefully observe the child and try to determine the current antecedents and consequences. With careful observation you may find that there is a way to change the antecedent or to plan consequences to influence the child's behaviors that you would like to change. In the future, we can talk about planning ways to reward behaviors that you would like the child to do more often and how to respond to behaviors you would like the child to do less often.

SUMMARY

a) A behavior is a specific action that can be observed. When teachers are specific in describing a child's behavior, more than one person can observe and agree upon the behavior.

b) Words such as "good" or "disruptive" reflect our feelings about a behavior; they do not tell us specifically what the child does.

c) Being specific about a child's behavior helps parents and teachers communicate more effectively.

d) Most behaviors that we engage in each day are learned behaviors.

e) Learned behaviors can be analyzed by looking at antecedents and consequences. Both antecedents and consequences play important roles in determining whether or not a behavior will occur.

f) Rewarding or pleasant consequences result in an increase in the frequency of the behavior. Punishing or unpleasant consequences result in a decrease in the frequency of the behavior.

BRINGING IT HOME

Fill in the following information:

1. Think of an example of one of the child's desirable behaviors. Identify the following:

Antecedent: ____________________

Behavior: ____________________

Consequence: ____________________

Type of Consequence: ____________________

Prediction: ____________________

2. Think of an example of one of your child's undesirable behaviors. Identify the following:

Antecedent: ____________________

Behavior: ____________________

Consequence: ____________________

Type of Consequence: ____________________

Prediction: ____________________

IN A NUTSHELL

1. A behavior is a specific action that a child does that you can observe.

2. When you are specific when talking about your child's behavior, it helps you to:

   a) clearly communicate to others what the child is actually doing;

   b) have more than one person agree upon the child's behavior; and

   c) observe the behavior without your feelings interfering.

3. Words such as "good" or "disruptive" reflect our feelings about a child's behavior; they do not tell us specifically what the child does.

4. Behaviors can be grouped into two categories -- those that we do naturally such as blinking, sneezing and shivering; and those that we have learned to do at some time in our life such as dressing, talking, or driving a car.

5. Most of children's behaviors are learned. Children learn social behaviors primarily through their interactions with adults and other children.

6. Behavior can be analyzed by looking at the following:

   Antecedent - the situation that comes before the behavior

   Behavior - the actual behavior that is observed

   Consequence - what happens immediately following the behavior

   (This process can be shortened to A-B-C for easy remembering).

7. The following examples illustrate the A-B-C process:
   a) During free play, Robbie finds some markers in the teacher's desk and "paints" the walls with them. The teacher notices after about 3 minutes (the damage was already done) and is horrified by the mess. She scolds Robbie and sends him away from the area.

Antecedent: Teachers busy, Robbie bored, markers available.
Behavior: Painting walls with markers.
Consequence: Scolding, sent away from area.

b) Maria is playing with a dollhouse on the floor. Carlos comes over and they play with the dollhouse together. Their teacher notices that they are sharing the toys and not fighting. She comes over and says to the kids, "You two are playing nicely together."

Antecedent: Maria is playing with the dollhouse.
Behavior: Maria and Carlos sharing the toy.
Consequence: Teacher praises Maria and Carlos.

8. Antecedents are important in determining if a behavior will occur. For example, placing a child's paint shirt in front of him at the easel may be an antecedent for him to put it on. For adults, the seat belt buzzer in the car is often an antecedent to buckle your seat belt. Antecedents set the stage for a behavior to occur.

9. Consequences often play the important role of strengthening or weakening the behaviors they follow. Rewarding or pleasant consequences result in the behavior happening more often. A special snack following a time when a child played and shared his toys with another child is likely to increase this type of playing. Smiles, hugs, and praise for following parent directions are likely to result in a child continuing to follow directions. Punishing or unpleasant consequences result in a behavior happening less often. Ignoring a child when he tantrums may result in fewer tantrums. Making a child go inside because he hit another child, may result in the child not hitting again when he plays outside in the future.

LEAP PRESCHOOL

PARENT SKILL TRAINING PROGRAM

MODULE #2: Teaching Your Child to Follow Directions

Main Ideas

- Reasons Children do not Follow Directions
- Ways to Make Difficult Directions Easier for Children to Follow
- How to Give Directions that are Clear and Specific
- What to do When a Child Follows a Direction
- What to do When a Child does not Follow a Direction

INTRODUCTION

Listening, understanding, and following directions are important skills for children to learn. Young children learn these skills through their interactions with their parents and other important people in their lives. Although children typically try to please people by doing what is asked of them, they will also, at times, test their limits by not following directions. Children may be trying to find a balance between pleasing the adults they interact with and asserting their own independence. The way the adult responds will affect how well the child follows directions in the future. This packet looks at why some children may not follow directions and some ways to teach children to follow more directions.

WHY WON'T MY CHILD LISTEN TO ME?

When your child doesn't follow your direction you may feel frustrated or angry. You may think "Why won't she listen to me?" You may try many other ways to get your child to follow your directions. Look at the following example:

> *Melanie wanted her daughter to set the table for dinner. She said "Megan, how about if you get the blue plates with the little flowers and the silverware and all the napkins, and put them on the table at everyone's place." Megan looked very confused and didn't even begin to follow the direction.*

Why did Megan not follow this direction? Sometimes children don't follow a direction because they do not understand what it means. The direction may be too complicated or too vague. It may not be clear if the child has a choice of whether or not to follow the direction. Some children also have a difficult time remembering a direction that is given too far ahead of when the direction is to be followed. How many of you remember giving your child a direction when you were getting them dressed or tying a shoe? It's possible that when you finished with what you are doing, your child no longer remembered what was asked. A direction such as "Don't forget to put the toys away when you are done eating dinner" may be difficult for a preschool child to remember. Here is another example:

> *Kristina was watching her favorite TV show. Her mother called from the kitchen and said "Kristina, pick up your toys." Kristina didn't even turn her head when her name was called.*

Why did Kristina not follow her mother's directions? Another reason that a child may not follow a direction is that she may not hear what is said. She may not have been paying attention to her mother or her mother was too far away for her to hear. You can probably remember hearing your name called in school when you weren't paying attention and hadn't heard the question. Children can get so wrapped up in a game, video, song, book or their own thoughts that they tune others out.

Here is another example:

> *Alex and his father, Arnold were having a wonderful time playing at the park. After about an hour, Arnold said "OK Alex, its time to go home. Come to the car". Alex sat down on the ground and began to cry.*

Why did Alex not follow the directions to come to the car? A third reason that children may not follow directions is that they don't want to do it. If they cry, ignore the direction, or begin to do something else, they may get out of doing something they really don't enjoy. Another common example of this is when a parent tells a child to go to bed. It is difficult for a child to leave favorite activities and toys that are so rewarding to go to bed, so the child may think up several excuses (a drink of water, 15 more minutes of a TV show, or another story) or simply ignore the direction. Here is another example:

> ***Rob was reading the newspaper while his son, Joseph, was playing nearby. After a short while, Joseph began to sneak up the stairs. Rob said "Joseph, please stay downstairs." Joseph giggled and ran up the stairs. Rob said, "OK, now I'm going to get you," and chased after him. By the time their chasing game was over, both Rob and Joseph were laughing.***

Why didn't Rob follow the direction? Sometimes children don't follow directions in order to get extra attention. Often, when a child doesn't follow a direction, the teacher will repeat it, give additional assistance or turn it into a game. This attention can be very reinforcing and the child may try to get the same attention when the parent can't or doesn't really want to play that game any longer. Another way a parent may respond when a child refuses to follow a direction is to yell, threaten, or engage in a discussion with the child. Even though this attention seems unpleasant, children may not follow a direction to continue to get this type of attention. Children may also anticipate receiving this extra attention because that is something that has happened in the past.

HOW TO GIVE A DIRECTION

Many times the way you state a direction can give a child a better chance of successfully following it. If your child hears and completely understands, she is more likely to do what you have asked. However, if your child does not understand the direction, for whatever reason, she will not be able to follow it. Making sure the direction is clear, specific, and within the child's ability will make it more likely that the direction will be followed. Look at example one again:

> *Melanie wanted her daughter to set the table for dinner. She said "Megan, how about if you get the blue plates with the little flowers and the silverware and all the napkins, and put them on the table at everyone's place". Megan looked very confused and didn't even begin to follow the direction.*

This is a very complex multi-step direction. There are several ways that Melanie could simplify this direction. One thing that is important to remember is to give one direction at a time. Giving your child too many directions at one time can be confusing for him and can reduce the chance that he will follow the direction. Initially, it is better to give one at a time. When you fell that your child is able to follow one step directions, you can begin to give more complex, multi-step directions such as "Get the plates and napkins."

Children may have a hard time following a direction that is too long or complicated. Giving short, simple directions is important for children that are just learning to follow directions. Instead of saying, "Ok now, Caitlin, be a big girl now and try real hard to pull up your pants", you can say "Caitlin, pull up your pants." This shorter sentence is easier for Caitlin to understand. She doesn't need to sort out which words actually go with what she is being asked to do. Extra words such as "OK, now", "How about if.." or "It would be really nice if you..." make a simple direction more difficult for a child to follow.

Another guideline for giving clear, simple directions is to be specific. Tell your child exactly what you want him to do. Specify the desired behavior in your instructions. If your child is throwing food on the floor and you say "Johnny," you have not told him what to do. If you say "stop it" it may temporarily stop the behavior, but he may still not know what you want him to do. If what you mean is "Johnny, keep your food on your plate" then you need to tell him so. Directions such as "be good," "stop," or "calm down" may be too vague for a child. They do not specifically tell a child what you want him to do.

Now look at example number 2 again:

Kristina was watching her favorite TV show. Her mother called from the kitchen and said "Kristina, pick up your toys." Kristina didn't even turn her head when her name was called.

Another important point to remember is to make sure that your child is paying attention to you when you give a direction. Remember that children can "tune out" parents. Before you give a direction, get your child's attention. Look at your child, make sure you are close to her, get down to her level, and say her name. You may need to eliminate some things that are distracting. Turn off the TV, take her aside from a group of children or get between her and the toy she is playing with. You may also need to stop some distracting behaviors before you give your child a direction. If the child is running around, tantrumming, throwing toys or doing some repetitive verbal or motor behavior, you may need to calm her or interrupt the behavior to be sure you have her attention. To do this, you could hold her on your lap or rest your hand on her shoulder.

It is also important to, whenever possible, state your direction in positive terms. In other words, emphasize the positive behavior rather than the negative behavior when giving your child a direction. Saying "don't" or "no" only teaches your child what not to do; it does not tell your child what you want him to do. Stating instructions positively will help teach your child the correct behavior. For example, instead of saying "don't run", you can tell your child to "remember to walk", or instead of saying "stop screaming" you can say "play quietly".

Remember that you can give extra assistance, if necessary. Directions are much easier for children to follow if they are accompanied by gestures or other prompts. If you tell a child to put his coat on, you could point to his coat, gently guide him toward it, give the sign language for coat or show him a picture of a coat to make sure he understands what you are asking. It is common for parents to tap or point to a chair when they ask their child to sit down. When a child is beginning to learn a complex task such as scooping food with a spoon, the parent can give the direction as he helps by guiding the spoon with his hand. Assistance given with a direction can be in many forms.

The final guideline for giving a direction to your child is that you tell the child what you want him to do rather than asking or suggesting. Read these statements:

> *"You could hang up your coat."*
>
> *"Let's see if you can sit still."*
>
> *"Can you ask for more milk?"*

These statements can be confusing to a child because it is not clear whether it is a direction that he must follow, or a "suggestion." Sometimes it is OK to give a "suggestion" to your child; it's part of a natural conversation. However, when your child does not have a choice of whether to follow the direction, a short, simple direction without extra words like "can you.." or "let's see if..." will be less confusing.

REDUCING THE NUMBER OF DIRECTIONS YOU GIVE

Here is an example:

> *Nicholas and his mother, Annie were playing with blocks. Annie gave the following directions within the first two minutes of play:*
>
> > *"Give me the red block."*
> > *"Put this block on top of your tower."*
> > *"Let's build a gas station."*
> > *"Go get a car."*
> > *"Put the little man in the car."*
> > *"Bring the car to the gas station."*
> > *"Don't knock down my tower."*

One thing to remember about giving directions to children is to give directions only when necessary. Be careful not to give a large number of instructions in a short time period. This may frustrate or be stressful to a child. Reducing the number of directions you give does not mean you need to talk or interact with your child less frequently. You can replace the time spent giving directions with talking about what your child is doing, or commenting on things you see. This is a great method of language enrichment for your child.

Another way to reduce the number of directions you give to your child is to offer choices. During play you may say, "Would you like to color with crayons or markers?" While dressing, the child can be given the choice of a red or blue shirt. Giving choices helps the parent guide the child in what to do while giving the child some control over the situation. Suggestions are another way to offer children choices. Instead of a direction such as "Turn off the TV," you could give the suggestion "If you want to, you could turn off the TV."

Stating this as a suggestion, however, implies that if he chooses, he can leave the game out. When your child does have a choice, be very clear about it. "If you want to...." or "Would you like to..." statements clearly give the child a choice. On the other hand, if he has no choice, be sure to state it as a clear direction.

You may also be able to give fewer directions if you redirect the child to a new activity rather that giving a direction. Here is an example:

> *Casey was spinning a metal lid on the kitchen floor, This behavior was beginning to annoy his mother and she wanted it to stop. She knew, however, that if she told him to stop and removed the lid that he would cry and tantrum for a long time. Instead, she got out his favorite toy musical instruments and placed them on the floor near him. When Casey began to play with them, his mother removed the lid and placed it out of reach.*

In this example, Casey's mother never needed to give a direction. She avoided a tantrum and made the situation easier to handle. Redirection is a strategy that can work in a number of situations. The key is to make the new activity or object more fun than what the child is currently doing.

DIRECTIONS THAT ARE DIFFICULT FOR CHILDREN

The most difficult directions for children to follow may be to end an activity that is very enjoyable or to begin an activity that they really don't like. Many children will cry, sit on the ground, tantrum, or simply ignore a direction that they don't want to follow. An illustration of this is the difficulty children have leaving a park or a playground, as in the previous example. There are some ways to make this type of situation a little easier and more positive. The first thing to think about is how you can make the direction or the transition from one activity to another more fun. The transition from the park to home may be a lot more fun for Alex if there was a stop at the ice cream store in between.

When you anticipate a difficult direction or transition, tell the child ahead of time what is going to happen. Simply letting a child know that there are just five more minutes before you'll have to leave, or that it's bedtime as soon as a certain TV program is over makes it easier for a child to be ready when you do give the direction.

Your child may also be more willing to follow a direction if you wait until she finishes or has had some time to enjoy the activity she is involved in. You may not always be able to wait to give an important direction or to allow your child as much time as she wants at a certain activity. However, if the child is very intent on an activity or has just become interested in a certain toy, it may be best to wait a few minutes before giving a direction.

AFTER THE DIRECTION IS GIVEN

When you give a child a direction, two things can happen. He follows your direction (or at least tries to) or he doesn't follow your direction. Either way, you have to be ready to respond. Here is an example:

Paula said, "Jeremy, please put your clothes in the hamper." Jeremy immediately stood up, picked up his clothes, and put them in the hamper.

How should Paula respond? She should reward Jeremy for following the direction. It is important to reward children for following directions. Whenever a child follows a direction or tries to follow it, let him know that you are pleased. Praise, a hug, or a smile will teach the child that following your directions is something that he should continue to do to get positive attention from you.

To give a child the best chance to get that positive attention, be sure that you have given the child plenty of time to follow a direction. For preschool children, this means to wait at least 5 seconds after you give a direction before you expect the child to begin to respond.

Now, what if Jeremy, in the previous example, didn't follow the direction? It is important to be ready with a consistent response. One important thing to remember is to not repeat your direction. Repeating the same direction several times may teach the child that he doesn't have to do it the first time. If your child does not follow the direction the first time, gently guide him to complete what you asked. Physical guidance means that you put your hand on your child's hand and help him follow your direction. Use only the amount of guidance needed for the child to complete the direction. Physical guidance can be just a "nudge" to the hand or arm or can be full, hand-over-hand assistance. This physical guidance works in several ways. If your child does not want to follow a direction, he learns that he needs to do what you ask. If he wants the extra attention of repeated directions or verbal discussion, you will help him do it without the extra attention. One way or another it will end up that he has followed the direction. Finally, if your child did not hear the direction or didn't understand what you asked, the physical guidance will teach your child what words were said and what they mean. You don't really have to think too hard about why your child didn't follow a particular direction because the physical guidance will be a good consequence either way.

CONCLUSION

One of the most important things to remember when teaching children to follow directions is to "pick your battles." It is important to consistently follow through on a few, very important directions than to struggle with the child on many minor issues. If you have decided a "direction" is not important, make sure you choose your words carefully, giving suggestions or descriptions of what the child is doing. When it is important that the child follow a direction, such as staying in the yard, or coming when you call, follow the guidelines that have been mentioned in this packet. Stop before you give a direction and ask yourself, "Is it important and am I willing and able to follow through?"

SUMMARY

1. Children may not follow direction if:
    a. they don't understand what it means
    b. they don't hear it
    c. they don't want to do it
    d. they expect extra attention

2. Some guidelines for giving directions to young children are:
    a. give one at a time
    b. give short, simple directions
    c. be specific
    d. state it positively
    e. make sure the child is paying attention
    f. give extra assistance, if necessary
    g. tell, don't ask

3. It is important to try to not to give too many directions to young children. A few guidelines for decreasing the number of directions you give are:

    a. give directions only when necessary
    b. offer choices
    c. redirect the child to a new activity rather than giving a direction.

4. Directions to end a fun activity or begin an activity that a child dislikes are difficult directions for children to follow. Try to make the directions easier and more fun. Some things you can try to make them easier are:

    a. make the direction or the transition from one activity to another more fun.
    b. give your child a warning when you anticipate a difficult direction or transition.
    c. wait until your child finishes or has had plenty of time to enjoy the activity he was involved in before giving a direction.

5. When you give your child a direction, two things can happen. Either he follows it or tries to follow it or he refuses or ignores the direction. When he does follow a direction, praise or reward him.

6. Give your child plenty of time to follow a direction and praise him when he does. If the child does not follow a direction, do not repeat it. Instead, physically guide him to complete it. This means to gently take his hand and guide him to complete the action you have asked him to do.

7. And remember, "pick your battles." Give directions that are important to you and that you are willing to follow through on.

BRINGING IT HOME

Answer the following questions:

Give an example of one activity or a time of the day when it is difficult for children to follow directions:

Why is this activity or time of day difficult?

For the activity or time period you listed, how would you use one or more of the following strategies to make following a direction less difficult for children?

a. Make the direction or transition more fun
b. Tell the child ahead of time what will happen
c. Allow enough time for the child to enjoy activity

How could you use one or more of the following strategies to reduce the number of directions you give during this activity?

a. Give directions only when necessary
b. Offer choices
c. Redirect child to a new activity

IN A NUTSHELL

1. There are many reasons that children may not follow directions. They include:

   a. they don't understand what it means
   b. they don't hear a direction
   c. they don't want to do it
   d. to get extra attention

2. Here are some guidelines for giving directions to young children:

   a. give just one direction at a time
   b. give directions that are short and simple
   c. be specific
   d. state the directions positively
   e. make sure the child is paying attentions to you when you give a direction
   f. give extra assistance, if necessary
   g. tell the child what to do rather than asking

3. It is also important to try to not give too many directions to young children. A few guidelines for decreasing the number of directions you give are:

   a. give directions only when necessary,
   b. offer choices
   c. redirect the child to a new activity rather than giving a direction.

4. Directions to end a fun activity or begin an activity that a child dislikes are difficult directions for children to follow. Some things you can try to make them easier are:

   a. make the direction or the transition from one activity to another more fun
   b. give the child a warning when you anticipate a difficult direction or transition
   c. wait until the child finishes or has had plenty of time to enjoy the activity she is involved in before giving a direction.

5. When you give your child a direction, two things can happen. Either he follows it or tries to follow it or he refuses or ignores the direction. When he does follow a direction, praise or reward him.

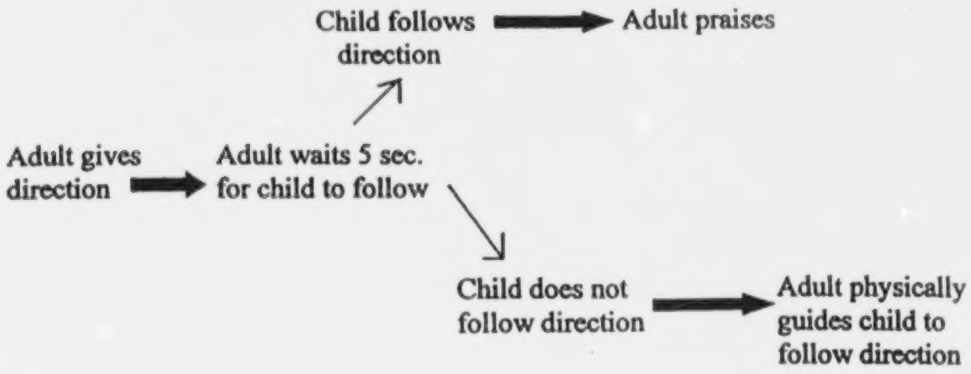
6. Give your child plenty or time (5 seconds) to respond to a direction.

7. If your child does not follow a direction, do not repeat the direction. Instead, physically guide him to complete the direction. This means to gently take his hand and guide him to complete the action you have asked him to do.

8. "Pick your battles." In other words, give directions that are important to you and that you are willing to follow through on.

Keep this as a handy reminder for giving directions:

Keep this as a handy reminder for giving directions:


Adult gives direction
Adult waits 5 sec. for child to follow
Child follows direction
Adult praises
Child does not follow direction
Adult physically guides child to follow direction

HOW TO TEACH CHILDREN TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

1. Make the direction or transition fun.
2. Give directions only when needed.
3. Tell, don't ask or suggest.
4. State your direction positively.
5. Make sure your child is attending.
6. Give directions that are short, simple, and specific.
7. Give extra assistance if necessary.
8. Allow enough time (5 sec.) for your child to respond.
9. Give directions only once.
10. Praise your child whenever he follows a direction. Use physical guidance when your child does not follow a direction.

LEAP PRESCHOOL

PARENT SKILL TRAINING PROGRAM

MODULE #3: An Introduction to Reinforcement

Main Ideas

- Definition of Reinforcement
- Kinds of Reinforcement
- **Recognition of Individual Differences in What is Reinforcing**
- **Things to Remember About When and How Often to Reinforce**
- **Necessity of "Catching a Child Being Good"**

Introduction

Please refer to Part I of the Activity Sheet on page 10. The sentences in Part I of this activity sheet all have two things in common: 1) each sentence refers to a behavior that someone wants to increase; and 2) each sentence describes a reward for that behavior.

Definition of Positive Reinforcement

A previous packet talked about how consequences can influence whether or not a behavior will continue. We said that if a behavior is followed by a consequence that is pleasant, the behavior will most likely happen more often. Another word for a pleasant consequence is a positive reinforcer. A positive reinforcer is any pleasant object or activity that is given to a person following a behavior which increases that behavior. Positive reinforcement is used to increase behavior many times each day. If one of our behaviors is followed by reinforcement, we will continue to do the behavior in the future. For example, if you order a new dessert and it tastes great, you will probably order it again. If you say hello to a neighbor and that person smiles and says hello back, you will most likely greet him again in the future. If you go to work each day and receive a paycheck at the end of the week, chances are you will continue to go to work. A good dessert, a response to a social gathering, and a paycheck are all examples of reinforcers.

Children are also reinforced for their behavior. For example, when an infant is learning to talk, mom or dad will smile, clap, and hug the child for making her first sounds. The child enjoys this reinforcement and continues to make sounds and words. If Katie draws a picture and her teacher says, "That's beautiful" and hangs it in the classroom, Katie will probably continue to make pictures for her teacher. If a teacher claps and says, "Good boy" when Andy throws his garbage away after snack for the first time, there is a good chance that Andy will continue this behavior. Attention and rewards given to a child for a certain behavior will increase the likelihood that the behavior will continue in the future.

Kinds of Reinforcers

Try to list ten objects or activities that could be reinforcers to children. Reinforcers can be grouped into four categories: 1) social reinforcers; 2) material or activity reinforcers; 3) food reinforcers; and 4) token reinforcers. The first type of reinforcer that we have listed is social reinforcers. Social reinforcement includes any kind of personal attention that a person enjoys. Kisses, hugs, and praise are examples of social reinforcement.

The second type is material or activity reinforcers. This includes objects or activities that a person enjoys. A special sticker, listening to a favorite music tape or taking a walk are all examples of material or activity reinforcement.

The next type is food reinforcers. Anything that a person likes to eat or drink can be a food reinforcer. Taking a break for a cup of tea after cleaning the kitchen is one example of a food reinforcer. Food reinforcers for a child may be getting a lollipop for good behavior during a video or getting a cookie for saying or signing "cookie."

The last type of reinforcer is token reinforcers. Token reinforcers are items that can be exchanged for something pleasant at a later time. Token reinforcers are typically used with older children that can wait for a reinforcer and can understand the connection between the token and what they will exchange it for. An example of token reinforcement would be giving a child a star on a chart every time she remembers to clean up toys after herself. When she has earned ten stars she can exchange them for a special prize. Giving a child an allowance for doing a household chore is also an example of token reinforcement. The money can be exchanged later for candy, a video game, or a small toy.

Individual Differences

Many of us have set up "reinforcement plans" for ourselves. Buying a new outfit when you lose weight, taking a long bubble bath after an afternoon of gardening or going out to dinner after painting the bedroom are all examples of how adults motivate themselves to increase a behavior. Let's think about what is reinforcing to us. In Part II of the Activity Sheet I, write down something that you don't like to do but think you should do more often. Now list some reinforcers that might motivate you to do this behavior more often. Finally, think of something that may be a reward for someone else but is not a reward for you. All of us enjoy different things. What may be reinforcing to one person may not be to someone else. The same is true with children. Watching a Mickey Mouse video may be a terrific reinforcer for Andre, but not very exciting to Cindy. A special snack of peanut butter crackers could be a reinforcer for Marie but not for Jacob who "can't stand peanut butter." For a reinforcer to be effective, that is, for it to increase a behavior, it must be something that the child enjoys.

Another thing to remember about individual differences with reinforcement is that children learn to respond to different reinforcers as they grow and mature. Think about a child as an infant. What things are reinforcers to them then? Would praise be a good reinforcer? Do babies do things just because they were right? As children grow and mature, they learn to take pride in their accomplishments and enjoy pleasing other. So, what is reinforcing to an older child may not be enough of or the right type of reinforcer for a younger child.

When to Reinforce

When you are teaching a new behavior, it is important to reinforce immediately after the behavior. If a child is not reinforced immediately after the behavior, she may become confused and not know why she is being reinforced. When the reinforcer is given immediately, it is easier for her to know which behaviors to continue.

Another reason that reinforcement should be immediate is that delaying the reinforcement may result in accidentally teaching a different behavior. Read this example:

Andee was trying to get Wendy to try new snacks. One day at snack, Wendy tried a new snack on her own then sat quietly in her chair. Andee was busy talking. After several minutes, Wendy began to loudly bang her hand on the table. Andee turned to Wendy, noticed that she had eaten all of her snack, and said, "What a good girl."

a. What behavior was Andee trying to increase?

b. Did Andee praise Wendy immediately after she finished the snack?

c. What behaviors did Andee actually reinforce?

Because Andee's reinforcement was delayed, she accidentally reinforced Wendy for two behaviors: 1) eating her snack; and 2) banging her hand on the table. Andee, without realizing it, may have taught Wendy that if she wants to get praise, she must first get her teacher's attention by banging her hand.

When you first begin to teach a new behavior, reinforce the behavior every time it happens. When a reinforcer is given every time a behavior happens, this is called continuous reinforcement. Here's an example:

Joe was concerned because Manny would often run into the street when heading to the playground. Joe wanted Manny to hold his hand while they walked to the playground. He decided to use a favorite music tape as a reinforcer to teach Manny to hold his hand. Joe explained to Manny that if he held hands while they walked to the playground, he could play the tape while playing outside. Manny held his teacher's hand every day during the first week. During the second week, the tape player broke down, and Joe had no tape player to use. Two weeks passed before the tape player was repaired. During this time, Manny began to run into street again.

a. What behavior was Joe trying to reinforce?

b. What was the reinforcer?

c. Was the plan for change working when Manny was reinforced every day?

d. What happened to Manny's behavior when he did not get reinforced every time?

When Manny was reinforced every day, he quickly learned to hold his teacher's hand. When the reinforcement stopped, however, Manny went back to running into the street. This example points out one of the disadvantages of using continuous reinforcement: although continuous reinforcement is the best way to increase a new behavior, the behavior will quickly disappear when the reinforcer stops.

Let's look at another example of continuous reinforcement.

Ann got annoyed each day time came for clean up in her classroom. Toys were scattered all over the room. Ann decided to hang a chart in the classroom with all of the children's names on it. Children could earn a special sticker next to their name every time they did a good job of cleaning up all of the toys in the class. The sticker chart has worked very well for one month but Ann wonders how long she should continue giving the children the expensive stickers.

a. What do you think might happen if Ann stops giving the children the reinforcement?

b. How could Ann gradually change the way the children earn reinforcement for cleaning the room?

The final goal for reinforcement programs is that the child works just for praise or for self-satisfaction. Although continuous reinforcement is the best way to teach a new behavior, we cannot stop there. Once a child's behavior has increased, it is important that you gradually fade the amount or type of reinforcement you give. Fading the reinforcer means gradually giving less of the reinforcer, as the child gets better at the behavior. In the example with Ann and her class, Ann could begin to give the children the stickers less often or could begin to give stars or check marks instead of fancy stickers. Both of these are examples of fading the reinforcer.

When you reinforce occasionally, rather than every time, this is called intermittent reinforcement. Intermittent reinforcement is the best way to strengthen a behavior and have it continue for a long time.

Let's look at some everyday examples of continuous and intermittent reinforcement. Suppose you went on a vacation to Las Vegas and decided to play the slot machines. You put a quarter in the slot machine but do not win any money. Would you put another quarter in? How many quarters would you put in before you would stop? Now you get thirsty and go to a Coke machine.

You put your money in and don't get a drink. Would you put more money in? How many times would you try before you would stop?

So when you expect to get reinforced each time, like with the Coke machine, your behavior of putting money in quickly stops when the reinforcement (the Coke) is not received. But, when you don't expect to get reinforced each time, like with the slot machine, your behavior will continue for a longer time.

When to reinforce:

1. Reinforce immediately after the behavior
2. Reinforce every time when teaching something new
3. Gradually fade the reinforcer
4. Reinforce occasionally to strengthen a behavior.

Catch the Child Being Good

One of the most important things to remember about reinforcement with children is to "catch" them being good. It is so easy to ignore or take good behavior for granted. When a child is being good, it is easy to get busy doing the million other things teachers do each day. However, when we do this we fall into a trap. Children find out that to get the teachers' attention they have to misbehave. It is much more effective to try to prevent the misbehavior by catching children while they are being good and giving them some special attention. Often this can be simply rubbing a child's back, giving one a hug, or showing one a smile. Sometimes you may need to take a break from what you are doing and spend some time playing, talking or doing a special activity with the child. Remember these three things:

a. Catch the children in your classroom being good.
b. Don't take good behavior for granted.
c. Praise the children in your classroom often for good behavior.

Summary

A. Positive reinforcement is any pleasant object or activity that is given to a person following a behavior which increases that behavior.

B. Reinforcers can be grouped into four categories:

1. Social Reinforcement
2. Material or Activity Reinforcement
3. Food Reinforcement
4. Token Reinforcement

C. Here are some things to remember about when to reinforce:

1. Reinforce immediately after the behavior you want to increase
2. When teaching a new behavior, reinforce the behavior every time it happens
3. As the child learns the behavior, gradually fade the type or amount of reinforcement you use
4. Reinforce occasionally to strengthen a behavior.

D. Catch the children being good. Praise or reinforce good behavior often.

Activity Sheet

PART I:

1. Each month a local nursing home honors a "Volunteer or the Month." Individuals who are nominated are those volunteers who have donated 20 hours or more that month. In addition to being honored at a special luncheon, a picture of the volunteer appears in the agency newsletter.
2. People's Bank advertises that free radios, calculators, and crystal will be given to customers who open savings accounts during the month of October.
3. Every Thursday night, the Oak Table Restaurant has a "Two-for-One" dinner special.
4. A preschool is selling chance tickets. The first prize is an all expense paid weekend for two in Atlantic City.
5. The American Auto Dealership gives their salespeople a 10% commission on each car that they sell.

PART II:

I don't like to ______________________________ but I know I should do it more often.

I might do it more often if:

____

____

I don't like ______________________________ but I know that other people do.

Bringing it Home

List a few reinforcers for a child or children that could be used to increase a behavior during each of the following activities. Remember that reinforcers can be social, material or activity, food, or token.

Freeplay: ____________________

Circle: ____________________

Centers: ____________________

Clean Up: ____________________

Snack: ____________________

Outside: ____________________

Other: ____________________

In a Nutshell

1. Positive reinforcement is defined as any pleasant object or activity that is given to a person following a behavior which increases that behavior.

2. There are many different kinds of reinforcers. They can be grouped into the following categories:

    a) Social Reinforcement
    b) Material or Activity Reinforcement
    c) Food Reinforcement
    d) Token Reinforcement

3. Social Reinforcement includes any kind of personal attention that a person enjoys. Kisses, hugs, and praise are examples of social reinforcement.

4. Material or activity reinforcement includes objects or activities that a person enjoys. A favorite toy or a shiny penny could be used as material reinforcers. A trip to the zoo or a special story are examples of activity reinforcement.

5. Examples of food reinforcers could include raisins, juice, cookies, or grapes. When using food reinforcers, remember:

    a) use nutritious foods if possible
    b) give small amounts (e.g., a morsel of the cookie)
    c) children will tire of food or drinks if they are used as reinforcers too often

6. Token reinforcement means reinforcing a child with an item that can be exchanged for something pleasant at a later time. Examples of token reinforcement include a) stars, checkmarks or stickers on a chart that when saved up, can be exchanged for a special prize or b) pennies that can be exchanged for a special treat at the end of the day. Remember that a child must be able to wait for reinforcement for a token reinforcer to be effective. Some young children or children with developmental delays may not understand the connection between the token and the reinforcement that comes much later.

LEAP PRESCHOOL

PARENT SKILL TRAINING PROGRAM

MODULE #4: How to Use Reinforcement with Your Child

Main Ideas

- How to Use Praise Effectively
- **Rewarding Small Steps**
- **Natural Reinforcement**
- Considerations When Selecting Reinforcers

INTRODUCTION

Reinforcement is defined as any pleasant object or activity that is given to a person after a behavior which increases that behavior. Increasing a behavior means that the behavior is likely to a) happen more often, b) happen for a longer period of time, and c) improve in quality. Today we are going to talk about some specific suggestions for using reinforcement with children.

SOCIAL REINFORCEMENT

Social reinforcement is any type of personal attention that someone enjoys. Social reinforcement includes hugs, high fives, and praise. All of these are easy and fun to give and cost nothing. Children enjoy attention and praise and will often continue to do a behavior that results in attention from adults. Praise is a common and important social reinforcer.

Since praise is such an important reinforcer, let's spend some time talking about good ways to use praise. One important thing to remember about using praise with your children is to be specific. Read these two statements:

a) "Thanks Bobby."

b) "Thanks for putting your clothes in the hamper, Bobby."

Which statement would mean more to Bobby? When you use specific praise to reinforce a child, he will know what he did that pleased you. He will also know what behavior to continue in the future to get your positive attention.

Another thing to remember when using praise with children is to be enthusiastic. A child may not be reinforced if he is praised sarcastically or in a monotone. Your tone of voice and facial expression should reflect your pleasure with your child's behavior. Your facial expression and enthusiastic praise is especially important if your child is very young or if the child may not understand the words in your praise statement.

Make sure your child is listening when you praise her. When you can, get down to your child's level and look right at her. Make sure the child sees your smile because this, again, will help her understand that you are pleased.

As adults, we may want children to learn to be reinforced by praise alone, but many young children or children with developmental delays may not initially recognize praise as reinforcing. One way to teach children to respond to praise alone is to initially praise them as you give them some other reinforcer. Here are some examples"

a) *Her dad gives Lisa a big hug and says "nice talking" when Lisa says "hi" to him.*
b) *Bonnie claps her hands as she tells her daughter "You did it, Gina! You took your coat off by yourself."*
c) *In the grocery store, Jared's son Alex is sitting in the cart. Jared gives his son a small box of raisins and says "Thanks for sitting quietly, Alex."*

Tickling, hugging, kisses, "piggy back" rides, back rubs, clapping hands, and "give me five" are examples of social reinforcers that could be paired with praise. If you can, pair the praise with another social reinforcement before trying more tangible reinforcers. However, if needed, praise can be paired with any reinforcer: food, material or activity, social or token. Remember to gradually fade the extra reinforcer to teach your child to respond to praise of attention alone.

As children grow and mature, they learn to take pride in their own accomplishments and enjoy pleasing other people who are important to them. As children reach this stage and begin to understand more, parents can begin to use encouraging statements that focus less on the specific behavior and more on how the child and teacher feel. Encouragement can be given for effort and improvement and helps the child feel proud of his abilities. Here are examples of encouragement statements:

1. *"You must be proud of yourself."*
2. *"I can see you really worked hard on that."*
3. *"I'm glad you're having fun."*

USING REINFORCEMENT NATURALLY

When you need to use a reinforcer other than social, it is a good idea to think of a way to use it in a natural situation. Here is an example:

Denise was trying to teach her son, Taylor, to undress himself. She knows that the most reinforcing things for Taylor are candy, playing with puzzles, watching cartoon videos and playing in water. Rather than giving Taylor an M&M for each piece of clothing he takes off or allowing him to watch a video when he undresses himself, Denise decided to work on undressing before bathtime. She bought Taylor a special bath puzzle and gives him one piece of the puzzle for each piece of clothing he removes. Taylor loves throwing each piece in the tub to make a splash. As soon as he is completely undressed, he gets to play with the puzzle during his bath.

The reinforcer that Denise chose is directly related to the behavior she is reinforcing. A natural reinforcer, as in this example, is the way people will respond to a child in everyday life. If a child says "Daddy" for the first time, it is more natural for Daddy to give him a hug or play a tickling game then to give him a sticker or a grape.

Another way to use reinforcement naturally is to use pleasant, routine activities to motivate your child to do something he enjoys. One way to do this is to use "Grandma's Rule." This rule states "You do what I want you to do, then you can do what you want to do." Here are two examples;

a) "Let me comb your hair and then you can go out to play" (Rather than "You can't play if you won't let me comb your hair")

b) "Lie down in bed and then I'll read you a story" (Rather than "No story if you won't lie down")

***** ***Grandma's Rule helps us to use positive rather than negative statements to motivate children.***

REWARDING SMALL STEPS

It is important to reinforce your child for small steps of improvement rather than setting a goal that is too difficult. Here is an example:

> *Evelyn was in tears almost every morning. Her son Aaron would refuse to get out of bed each morning. He would make his body stiff to resist his mother dressing him and he would push her away when she tried to wash his face or brush his teeth. There was almost always a tantrum at the breakfast table. Evelyn needed a plan for change. She decided to give Aaron stickers of his favorite cartoon character for cooperating and doing what she asked him each morning. She explained to Aaron that he needed to get out of bed, help put his clothes on, allow his face to be washed and his teeth brushed and to sit quietly at breakfast to get the sticker.On the first day, Aaron got out of bed, dressed himself, and cooperated in washing his face and brushing his teeth, but had a tantrum at breakfast. On the second day, Aaron got out of bed, but did not cooperate in dressing or washing up. The third and fourth days were similar. And on the fifth day Aaron refused to get out of bed. Aaron never got a sticker.*

Evelyn was asking Aaron to change too many behaviors for one small reinforcer. How could Requiring a drastic change in behavior to receive a small reinforcer may not be effective. In other words, reward for small steps of improvement.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING A REINFORCER

When you have decided that social reinforcement alone is not enough to motivate your child to increase a certain behavior, it's time to think about what other reinforcement could be used. Certainly, you'll want to choose something that you know your child enjoys, but there are some other things to consider. For one thing, reinforcement should be convenient and not disruptive to your daily routine. Giving your child homemade pancakes for breakfast because he made his bed may be difficult during a hectic morning. If it is difficult to give the reinforcement you choose, you may find yourself skipping it, or promising to give it later which could be less effective. The reinforcer you choose should not lead to disruptive behavior. Here is an example:

> *Tyrone's mother, Kate, wanted to increase his appropriate behavior during shopping. She decided to let him have the car keys to open the car door and trunk if he was quiet and stayed in the cart while they shopped. However, when they got to the car, Kate always had a struggle to get the keys back. Tyrone wanted to put the keys in the ignition and start the car, too. He would cry, push her away and sometimes lie down on the ground when his mother asked him to give her the keys.*

This is an example of a reinforcer that leads to a disruptive behavior. Using a noisy toy as a reinforcer then asking your child to play quietly because the room is getting too noisy would be another example.

It is also important, when you plan to use a special reinforcer, that is not available at other times during your child's day. If your child gets pudding for snack at school, using pudding as a reinforcer for good behavior during dinner may not be effective. When you plan to use a special reinforcement to increase your child's behavior, talk to other caregivers to make sure they know not to offer the same thing.

A reinforcer should only be given if your child does the behavior. Here is an example:

> *Sammy's parents were working on teaching him to communicate by showing them pictures. Since cheese curls were one of Sammy's favorite foods, they put*

a picture of them in his communication book. When Sammy banged on the cupboard door to indicate he wanted a snack, his father showed him his book. If Sammy did not indicate the correct picture, his father would still give him the cheese curls.

Sammy got the reinforcer, whether or not he showed his parents the correct picture. He may not be motivated to use pictures to communicate if he knows he'll get the cheese curls anyway. You must be willing to physically help your child do the behavior or to withhold the reinforcer you choose when your child does not do the desired behavior. You would not want to promise a trip to Grandma's or a day at the amusement park for good behavior if you are not willing to cancel the outings.

Another important thing about choosing a reinforcer is to change the reinforcer or vary it so that your child does not get tired of it. If you decide to use your child's favorite book as a reinforcer for sitting on the potty, keep in mind that after a few times "The Cat in the Hat" may no longer be your child's favorite book. He may be bored with it. If you are aware that a reinforcer is becoming less motivating, you can either pick a new reinforcer, for example a small toy, or you can vary the reinforcer, (i.e. in other words, try a different book). Sometimes the person giving the reinforcer may also get bored or tired of it and begin to be less enthusiastic in giving it. This would be another time to think about changing or varying the reinforcer.

Finally, when you give your child a special reinforcer, try to give only the amount needed. For example, if an inexpensive matchbox car is motivating your child, don't use a more expensive, larger toy car. Also, if you decide to use a food reinforcer such as animal crackers, use one or two crackers rather than the whole box. If you use too much of the same reinforcer, your child will get tired of it.

SUMMARY

Summarize the session by reviewing the following:

A. When you use praise with your child:

1. be specific,
2. be enthusiastic,
3. make sure he is listening,
4. when necessary, pair praise with another reinforcer, and
5. begin to use encouragement statements as the child matures and is able to understand more

B. When you use a reinforcer other than praise, use it in a natural situation.

C. Reinforce your child for small steps of improvement rather than setting a goal that is so difficult that she has little chance to earn the reinforcement.

D. Choose a reinforcement that:

1. is convenient and not disruptive to your routine,
2. does not lead to disruptive behavior,
3. is not available at other times, and
4. you are willing to not give in if the behavior does not occur.

BRINGING IT HOME

Fill in the answers for the following statements:

One behavior that I would like my child to increase is:

____

Here is an example of how I could be specific when praising my child for this behavior:

____

I think that just praise will be motivating enough to increase this behavior:

__ Yes

__ No

If no..... I will try to pair the praise with the following reinforcer:

____

Will this reinforcer....

Be convenient?	__ Yes	__ No
Be disruptive to daily routine?	__ Yes	__ No
Lead to disruptive behavior?	__ Yes	__ No
Available at other times?	__ Yes	__ No

If I need to change or vary the reinforcer because my child gets tired of it, here's what I could try:

____

IN A NUTSHELL

1. Social reinforcement is any type of personal attention that a person enjoys. Praise is a common and important social reinforcer.

2. To praise most effectively, remember to:

   a. be specific
   b. be enthusiastic
   c. make sure your child is listening
   d. pair praise with other reinforcers if praise alone is not effective, and
   e. begin to use encouraging statements as the child matures and is able to understand more

3. When you need to use a reinforcer other than social, try to use it in a natural situation. For example, if you want to use a food reinforcer to teach colors, you could use jellybeans, M&M's, or other colored foods. Ask the child what color the food is, then give it to him for a correct answer.

4. Use Grandma's rule to motivate children in a positive way. Grandma's rule states "You do what I want you to do, then you can do what you want to do". Grandma's rule uses activities or materials that the child enjoys to reinforce behaviors that the child does not enjoy. An example of Grandma's rule is "Pick up the puzzles, then we can paint".

5. Reinforce your child for small steps of improvement. Do not require a drastic change in behavior for your child to earn a reinforcer.

6. Here are some things to consider when using a reinforcer other than social reinforcement. The reinforcer should:

   a. be convenient and not disruptive to your daily routine,
   b. not lead to disruptive behavior,
   c. not be available at other times,
   d. be given only when the child has done the behavior,
   e. be changed or varied if the child gets bored with it, and
   f. be given in small amounts.

LEAP PRESCHOOL

PARENT SKILL TRAINING PROGRAM

MODULE #5: Planning Activities to Increase Desired Behaviors

Main Ideas

- Planning Activities that are Enjoyable and Appropriate
- Anticipating Problems During Activities
- Controlling Materials
- Scheduling Activities
- Establishing Reinforcement Plans, Rules and Consequences During Activities

INTRODUCTION

Keith and his wife, Becky, are planning a trip to visit Keith's parents. They will be driving for eight hours with their three children, Dean (8 yrs), Will (3 yrs) and Jane (11mos.). When they went on this trip just two months ago, it was as Dean describes it, "a disaster". Keith and Becky know that they will have to plan carefully to make sure this is a pleasant trip for everyone.

Parents dread certain times of the day or certain activities because their children do not always behave well during them. In this packet we will be talking about how to plan for these times to make them easier and more enjoyable for everyone.

ANTICIPATE PROBLEMS

In our example, Keith and Becky have already begun the process of planning activities in increase desired behavior. They are anticipating that, without some pre-planning, the eight hour car trip could be difficult. The first thing that is important in planning for certain activities is to anticipate problems. This step is usually easy for parents. Parents can often predict very accurately if their children will behave during certain activities and which activities are likely to be difficult. Sometimes you can anticipate problems because of your child's behavior during the same activity or a similar activity in the past. Other activities that may be difficult are those that happen infrequently, such as a car trip or a long series of doctor's appointments in one day. And, sometimes you can anticipate that an activity will be difficult if it occurs during a time of day when you or your child are tired.

Once you have thought about an activity or a time or day that you would like to plan for, it may be helpful to think about what you would like your child to be doing during this time and some of the undesirable behaviors that may come up. Here is an example:

> *Keith and Becky would like their children to sleep or play quietly during the long car trip. During the trip two months ago, all three children were awake during most of the trip. There were many arguments over toys and quite a bit of crying.*

Thinking about what you would like your child to be doing and what some of the problems may be will help you with thorough planning for the activity.

KEEP YOUR CHILD BUSY OR ENTERTAINED

Another way to encourage desired behavior during an activity is to think about ways to keep your child busy or entertained. Here is an example:

> *Keith and Becky have quite a few ideas for keeping their children busy during the long trip. They have prepared separate bags of toys for each child. Dean (8 yrs) helped get his own bag ready. He packed three books, a hand held video game and tape player with headphones. His mother also bought him a map so he can follow along. Will (3 yrs) has a coloring book and crayons, his favorite stuffed animal, Disney characters dolls and a new picture book. Becky filled Jane's (11 mos) bag with rattles, a wind up radio and her blanket. Keith has collected a supply of snacks and juice boxes for the trip.*

These parents have thought of several ways to keep Keith and other children busy during the trip. These ideas can be used in may situations. One thing to think about is how to make the time or activity more fun. For example, if the activity is waiting to pick up a brother or sister at the bus stop, you may be able to think of a game to play while you are waiting . Counting cars, finding colors (i.e. the "I see something you don't see..." game) or singing songs may help pass the time.

You may also be able to make the activity more fun by involving your child in the activity. When a child is not involved in the activity, the boredom may result in undesirable behaviors. Just sitting in the cart during grocery shopping or waiting while mom makes dinner may not be very exciting for a young child. Although having a child "help" make dinner or find things in the grocery store may make the activity longer, the time spent together may be more enjoyable and there will probably be fewer undesirable behaviors. Involving your child in the activity also helps her begin to learn what is expected of her in that situation. Some other examples of involving your child in an activity would be allowing your child to look at choose his own meal at a restaurant, giving your child some small things to pack for a vacation or letting your child put the stamps on the envelopes while you are paying bills. For some activities, you may want to set up a "play" set of materials that your child can use while you do the real activity. A toy sink and dishes in the kitchen, an old typewriter, paper and pens in the den, or a toy lawnmower and gardening tools in the yard can encourage a child to pretend to help mom or dad.

When an activity involves some waiting, like waiting in line at the bank or store or waiting for an appointment at the doctor's office, you may need to bring some things with you to keep children entertained. A small bag of toys, some favorite books, or snacks may make waiting more fun. Many restaurants make this easy for parents by providing crayons, placements to color, small toys, or crackers for children while they are waiting for their meal. Sometimes a child shows such a special preference for a certain toy or object that her parents would like to limit how long she plays with it. Some examples of this may be a child that would spend hours winding up and listening to a toy radio or watching a toy car roll back and forth. The parents may want to limit the amount of time with these toys so that their child learns to play with other toys or interact with friends and family. Even if you are trying to limit the amount of time your child does a certain activity, you can use these special preferences to your advantage. You may decide that your child can have that toy when you need your child to play independently and quietly for a period of time. In other words, save that object or toy for special occasions when you know that a particular activity may be difficult.

Finally, when an activity or time of day is consistently difficult, you may want to set aside special items or snacks that you use just for that activity. For example, some parents keep some special, quiet toys, such as colorforms, videotapes or special markers and paper, near the telephone so that they can give them to their children when they need to talk for a while without being disturbed. These toys should be toys that your child is familiar with, can do by himself, and are "special" enough that he will spend some time with them. Another example of setting aside special items is having a bag of toys that stays in the car. Toys such as drawing boards, books, or a few small character dolls may keep your child's attention during a daily commute to school.

CONTROL MATERIALS

When you take toys, snacks, or books along on a field trip, another thing to plan to increase desired behavior is how to keep some control over the materials. Keith and Becky think that this is the biggest mistake they made during the last long trip they took.

> *During the last trip Keith and his family took to visit his parents, they felt that there was no control in the car. Toys were scattered everywhere, the boys were throwing food at each other and the baby kept putting small toys in her mouth. Dean and Will were grabbing toys from each other and arguing almost constantly. To keep more control over materials, Becky plans to hold Will and Jane's bags and give out one item at a time. She will also remind Dean to put things away when he is done so that the other children will not bother with them. Becky plans to keep all of the snacks in the front seat with her. Keith and Becky were careful to avoid toys like small cars that Will and Dean often argue over and Lego blocks that Jane may put in her mouth.*

Keith and Becky plan to control the materials in several ways. One way to control materials is to control how quickly children use the materials you bring along. Keith and Becky plan to do this by giving just one item at a time to their younger children so that they are not tired of all that they brought in just a short period of time. Some parents wrap surprises for trips and give one to their children every hour they are in the car. These surprises can be inexpensive toys or snacks.

In this example, Keith and Becky also plan to make sure one thing is put away before getting the next one out. Young children have a difficult time planning activities and can easily become overwhelmed when there are too many things to choose from. When each item is put away before getting another one out, the materials remain organized and children can spend more time with one toy without being distracted by other materials that are within sight. This strategy is often helpful at home when children tend to have every toy they own scattered all over the house. It is surprising how toys can be "rediscovered" when they are organized in a new way; on shelves, in new bins, baskets or boxes or just one toy at a time organized on a table or floor in a tempting manner.

Keeping some toys out of reach can also eliminate the problem of children constantly wanting to change toys. Toys with many small parts, toys that need adult supervision and toys that a child has a difficult time sharing with others in the classroom can be placed on a high shelf, on top of the refrigerator, or in a cupboard until a time when you have time to play with your child. Keeping certain toys out of reach can also limit the amount of time a child spends with a certain toy. When children are overwhelmed by the number of toys available to them, many teachers put some of the toys away in a closet for a few weeks then switch toys. Suddenly, all of those old toys seem new and interesting.

It is also important when you are planning materials for a certain activity that you select toys or objects that don't encourage undesirable behavior. Keith and Becky did this when they decided to avoid Legos and small cars in our example. When you are busy, you don't have time to be teaching the appropriate way to play with toys or responding to undesirable behaviors. It is easier to pick toys that your child knows how to play with and typically plays with appropriately.

Finally, don't forget to think about the safety of the materials you choose. Select toys or objects that your child can play with safely and childproof environments. If you are planning for an activity during which you won't be with your child or you will be unable to always be watching your child, make sure the toys, objects, furniture, and other materials in the area are safe for your child. If your child tends to climb on furniture, you may not want to leave him alone in a room with high bookshelves or dressers. If your child puts small items in her mouth, you would want to make sure the toys and materials in the area are large enough that they cannot be swallowed.

PLAN APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

When you are planning an activity or time of day for your child, think about if the activity and the length of the activity are appropriate for your child's age and interests.

Look at the following example:

> *Becky and Keith have planned several stops along the way to make the long car trip a little easier for their young family. They know of a fast food restaurant along the way that has a very nice playground and plan to stop there for breakfast. They have packed a picnic ground for lunch and to let the children run around a little. Another quick stop is planned at a roadside rest stop is planned for the afternoon.*

A two hour shopping trip or long visit with an elderly aunt can be quite difficult for a young child. Sometimes this is simply because the child is too young, does not understand the purpose of the trips or the conversations that are taking place. Young children can easily get bored during adult activities. If you aren't sure what is appropriate for your child, talk to other parents or watch other children during similar activities. Sometimes the behaviors that are really bothering you, may be quite typical for young children.

Sometimes you can break up activities so that a long activity is easier for a child. Half way through a long shopping trip you can give child a chance to stop for a snack or play on video game. Your child may enjoy a walk in the neighborhood as a break from a visit with an elderly aunt.

There may be activities that you would like your child to be involved in that are simply not a good match for your child. A child with a very short attention span may have a difficult time during story hour at the library. A child that enjoys quiet, individual activities, may be unhappy playing on a soccer team. When you are planning an activity for your child, there are several things to consider. Plan activities for your child based on his age as well as his interests and abilities. However, sometimes you may need to also consider the importance of the activity to your child's social and cognitive growth. For example, a child that prefers playing alone may need to be involved in some social or play activities to develop better social skills.

And finally, don't hesitate when the planning and carrying out of some activities becomes too difficult to avoid the situation. Arrange for babysitting or shop while another family member can watch your child. Visit relatives and friends when your child is in school or ask for help from neighbors, community service groups or respite care agencies. You may be able to set up a time when you will watch a neighbor's child in exchange for some time when she will watch your child. Keep in mind that although avoiding the situation is a good way to make your day easier, it does not give your child the opportunity to learn how to act in the situation. If it is a situation that your child eventually needs to participate in, plan ways in the future to slowly get your child used to the situation by making short visits, taking an extra person along or making more frequent visits.

SCHEDULING ACTIVITIES

Keith and Becky plan to leave their house at about 5:00 AM. They have done this before and found that the children will typically go right back to sleep when they get in the car and will sleep for a few hours. With the stops that they have planned, there won't be more than two or three hours of straight driving.

In this example, Keith and Becky have thought about the best time and length of time for the trip to decrease the chance of undesirable behaviors. The first thing that they have done is to plan this activity for a time of day when the undesirable behaviors are less likely to occur. One of the desired behaviors they identified was that they would like the children to sleep in the car. Leaving early in the morning will make this more likely.

If the children do not fall back to sleep, they will probably be well rested because they will have slept all night. Its important to consider how tired or cranky your child is at different times of the day. You may want to schedule a difficult activity at a time when both you and your child are well rested. Undesirable behaviors will be less likely to happen and you will have more energy to thoroughly plan and structure the activity.

Scheduling activities at consistent and routine times may also help. For example, if your child knows that bedtime is always at 9:00 PM, right after her bath, there may be less whining and trying to get out of going to bed. Having a routine and consistent time schedule of activities for your child helps her know what to expect and what will be expected of her during a specified time period.

MODEL AND REWARD DESIRED BEHAVIOR

One of the most important things to remember when planning a difficult activity is to frequently reward your child when he does what you want him to do. Look at the following example:

> *Periodically throughout the trip, Keith or Becky pull out a special unexpected treat like a bag of cheese curls or a new audio tape for the car player. These are pulled out when all of the children are playing quietly. The parents also frequently praise the children for good behavior.*

Catch your child being good. That's what Keith and Becky are doing in this example. Try to reward for good behavior more often than you respond to undesirable behaviors. Also, try to start off on a positive note. In other words, begin to reward your child for good behavior before the undesirable behavior happens.

When there are other children with you during a certain activity, you may be able to reinforce their good behavior or use them as models for desired behavior. When a child hears or sees another child get reinforced for a certain behavior, she may try to get the same reinforcement by imitating the desired behavior. Keith or Becky may say to Dean "Thanks for putting that toy away". This would work as a reinforcer for Dean and a reminder to Will to put his toys away when he is finished.

You may also want to use Grandma's Rule as part of the activity. This rule states "You do what I want you to do, then you can do what you want to do". For example, you may say to your child "When you play quietly with that toy for awhile, then we can go out for a walk". Remember to consider your child's ability to understand this type of statement and how long your child could wait for the reinforcement when planning the activity. Remember to plan ahead. Don't wait until the undesirable behaviors happen before you begin to use "Grandma's Rule".

ESTABLISH CLEAR RULES AND CONSEQUENCES

Look at the following example:

At the beginning of the trip and periodically throughout the trip, Keith and Becky remind the children of two important rules for the car. One is to play or talk quietly and the other is to stay in your seatbelt at all times.

It is important during difficult activities that children know what is expected of them. Establishing clear rules and explaining them to children in simple, positive terms will help your child understand what you want them to do. For example, if a child has a tendency to run ahead of your when you are walking in the shopping mall, the "rule" might be "Hold Mommy's hand" rather than "no running". This is stated positively so that the child knows what is expected of him and is not reminded of the undesirable behavior. Be sure to state the rules as the activity begins.

Rules that you set for children should be stated as concretely as possible.

Telling a four year old that bedtime is in a half an hour may be less clear than saying "When this TV show is over, it will be time for bed". Telling your child to "stay close to me" at the playground may not be as clear as saying something like "stay inside the fence or stay on this side of the swings". Another example of concrete rules would be to set a kitchen timer to let a child know when it is time to clean up her toys. Concrete objects or events such as obvious endings to activities, physical boundaries, or a bell ringing can help clarify rules for children.

It is a good idea to give your child periodic reminders of what you would like her to be doing. The easiest way to do this is by restating the "rule" while reinforcing her. For example you may say "thanks for remembering to hold my hand."

The number of "rules" for a particular activity should be small so that children can easily remember them and are not overwhelmed. One to three "rules" is a reasonable number for a young child.

CONCLUSION

These simple strategies may be helpful when you are planning activities for your child. Sometimes five or ten minutes worth of planning can help make a difficult activity more enjoyable for both you and your child. As your child gets older, you may be able to give her more responsibility to plan activities, take along toys and keep more control over her own materials. It is important that older children begin to take on this responsibility. Just as you teach independence in dressing, eating, and playing, teaching your child to independently plan for activities and "keep herself busy" when there is waiting involved is an important goal.

SUMMARY

A. Planning for activities that have been difficult in the past may make them easier and more enjoyable for everyone.

B. When you anticipate that there may be problems during a certain activity you can encourage more desired behavior by:

1. planning alternative activities to make the activity more fun and involve the child in the activity,
2. controlling materials
3. planning activities that are appropriate for your child's age, interests and abilities
4. scheduling activities at times of the day when undesirable behaviors are less likely to occur
5. modeling and rewarding desired behavior often, and
6. establishing clear rules and consequences

BRINGING IT HOME

Think about an activity or time of day that is difficult for your child. Plan for this activity using the following chart:

ACTIVITY	
ANTICIPATE PROBLEMS -List what you would like your child to be doing -List possible undesirable behaviors that may occur during an activity	
PLAN ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES -Make activity more fun -Involve child in activity -Bring toys or snacks along -Set aside special items	
CONTROL MATERIALS -Control how quickly materials are used -Put away things as they are used -Keep some things out of reach -Childproof	
PLAN APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES -Break up long activities	
SCHEDULING ACTIVITIES -Schedule at times of day when undesirable behaviors are less likely to occur -Schedule at consistent and routine times	
MODEL AND REWARD DESIRED BEHAVIORS -Catch your child being good -Reinforce other children -use Grandma's Rule	
ESTABLISH CLEAR RULES AND CONSEQUENCES -State positively -State concretely -Give reminders -Keep number of rules small	

IN A NUTSHELL

A. Planning for activities that have been difficult in the past may make them easier and more enjoyable for everyone.

B. When you anticipate that there may be problems during a certain activity you can encourage more desired behavior by:

   1. planning alternative activities to make the activity more fun and involve the child in the activity,
   2. controlling materials
   3. planning activities that are appropriate for your child's age, interests and abilities
   4. scheduling activities at times of the day when undesirable behaviors are less likely to occur
   5. modeling and rewarding desired behavior often, and
   6. establishing clear rules and consequences

LEAP PRESCHOOL

PARENT SKILL TRAINING PROGRAM

MODULE #6: Responding to Your Child's Undesirable Behaviors

Main Ideas

- **Why Children Continue Undesirable Behaviors**
- **Ways to Respond to Undesirable Behaviors**
- **Deciding Which Strategy to Use**

INTRODUCTION

"I wish my child would stop doing that". You have probably said that about one (or more) of your child's behaviors. Screaming, whining, hand-waving, and hitting are all examples of behaviors that parents would like their children to stop, or at least do less often. Professionals often refer to these behaviors as inappropriate, undesirable, or problem behaviors. It doesn't matter, all you know is you want them to stop. There are four types of behaviors that parents are typically concerned about. These are: 1) a behavior that is dangerous or may result in the child hurting himself or others , 2) a behavior that may result in objects, toys, furniture, or other materials being damaged or destroyed, 3) a behavior that interferes with the child or another person's learning, and 4) a behavior that is annoying or disruptive to the parent or other people. In this packet we will be discussing ways to respond to behaviors such as these.

"WHY DOES THIS CHILD DO THAT?"

Think about something that your child does that you don't like. Can you remember the very first time it happened? Chances are that you can't. Why did your child do it that very first time? There are a lot of reasons a child might "try out" a new behavior. Sometimes it's just an accident, like dropping an egg on the floor. Or, out of frustration, a child may throw the pieces of a puzzle. A child with limited language may cry when he wants a certain toy. A child that is not paying attention, may walk into the street. Children are active learners. They learn through play, exploration, and interactions with people. In the process, they try a lot of things. When a child does one of these behaviors that first time, whether through frustration, an accident, play, exploration, or communication, we probably don't consider it a problem. It's when it starts happening over and over that parents become frustrated and begin to wonder how to get it to stop. So if the first question was "Why did my child do that in the first place?", the next question would be "Why does this child continue to do it?"

Usually what happens right after a behavior (the consequence) will determine if the behavior continues or increases in the future. Children continue behaviors because of what happened when they tried it in the past. A child who drops an egg on the floor may like that squishy sound. Seeing that slimy colorful egg on the floor may make him want to try it again. A child who absent mindedly walks into the street may enjoy the attention he receives from his mother and the next door neighbor as they come running to get him. In other words, the child receives some kind of reinforcement for the behavior he tries, so he continues to do it.

Although it is not always a simple task, it is important to try to figure out what is reinforcing the behavior. If we can determine what is rewarding the behavior, it will be easier to decide how to respond to the behavior in the future. Here are a few descriptions of children; see if you can identify reinforcers that cause behaviors to continue.

1. *Nathan's mom Julie was washing the kitchen floor. Nathan wanted her to play a game with him and kept repeating over and over "play ball, play ball, play ball". This repetition began to annoy Julie so she stopped cleaning and played ball.*

Ask yourself the following questions:

a) What do you think Julie would like Nathan to stop doing or do less often?
b) What was happening when Nathan started to repeat "play ball"? What was the antecedent?
c) What happened after Nathan repeated "play ball"? What was the consequence?

In this example, Julie gave Nathan attention when he repeated "play ball" over and over. So one type of reinforcer that may cause a behavior to continue is attention. Here is another example:

2. *At the grocery store, Andy asked for a candy bar. His mother Joni said "You can't have a candy bar now, it's almost dinner time". Andy asked for it again and again and began to whine and cry. Joni wanted some piece and quiet so she said "Oh, ok, but you better eat your dinner tonight" and gave him the candy.*

a) What do you think Joni would like Andy to stop doing or do less often?
b) What was happening when Andy began to whine and cry? What was the antecedent?
c) What happened following the whining and crying? What was the consequence?

Andy's whining and crying was followed by his mom giving him a candy bar. Receiving a reward following a behavior may cause the behavior to continue. Read the next example:

3. *Emily hated to have her hair washed and would often kick and scream. Sometimes when her father was bathing her and she began to kick and scream, he would decide not to wash her hair that day.*

a) What do you think Emily's father would like her to stop doing or do less often?
b) What would happen before the kicking and screaming? What was the antecedent?
c) What would her father sometimes do when she began kicking and screaming in circle? What was the consequence?

In this example, the behavior of kicking and screaming will probably continue because Emily is sometimes getting out of doing something she dislikes. Another reinforcer that causes behaviors to continue is getting out of something unpleasant or escaping from a task. Read the last example:

4. *Wyatt would often lie on the floor and roll a car in front of his eyes. He enjoyed watching the wheels spin. The behavior occurred when his parents were in or out of the room.*

a) What do you think Wyatt's parents would like him to stop doing or do less often?
b) What is happening when Wyatt rolls the car in front of his eyes?
c) What is reinforcing about this activity? What is the consequence?

The consequence in this example is the activity itself. The activity of watching the wheels spin is reinforcing to Wyatt. The activity is self reinforcing. Many children are soothed or comforted by self reinforcing behaviors such as thumb sucking, nail biting, or twirling hair with fingers. Some children's self reinforcing behaviors are less common such as head banging, handwaving, or finger flicking. Parents may want their child to stop the behaviors or do them less often when they begin to interfere with learning opportunities, or when the child is actually hurting himself. Other types of self reinforcing activities may include coloring on the wall, playing with mom's make-up or dad's shaving cream or noisily bouncing a ball against a door.

REINFORCE TO INCREASE DESIRED BEHAVIOR

For every behavior you would like your child to do less often, there is a desired behavior to take its place. For example, if you would like your son to stop throwing toys, you would probably like to replace that behavior with playing appropriately with toys or putting them away quietly. Whenever you identify a behavior you would like to do less often, think about what you can begin to reward or teach that will take its place.

Sometimes the only plan for change for a behavior you would like to decrease will be to teach your child how to do a skill or communicate a need. Let's look back at the examples:

a) In example #1, Nathan's mom could reinforce other behaviors such as asking only one time to play ball, waiting for attention, or independent play.

b) In example #2, Andy's mom could reinforce sitting quietly in the cart or talking quietly.

c) In example #3, Emily's dad could have reinforced sitting still and quietly in the tub.

d) In example #4, Wyatt's mom could have reinforced sitting while playing with the cars, or pushing the car to the parent.

You can either wait until the desired behavior happens to give attention or a reinforcer, or you can actively teach the behavior. It is important that this positive attention can be planned before deciding how to respond to the behavior to be decreased. It is also important to think about ways to plan activities to decrease the likelihood of the undesirable behavior occurring in the first place. Look at the following example:

> *Min's daughter Kimi rips the pages out of her books. Many of her books are ruined. She has also ripped her parent's and brother's books. Min is very concerned. Before deciding on how to respond to his, she has decided to try to reorganized the books in her house so that they are not readily available to Kimi. Min has placed some cardboard page books on a shelf that Kimi can reach. Min has also begun to sit and read with Kimi more often and is teaching her to turn pages in a book slowly and carefully. Whenever Min sees Kimi turning pages in books carefully, she praises her.*

Before you begin to plan a consequence for an undesirable behavior, follow these steps:

1. Identify an alternative behavior to take its place.
2. Teach and/or reinforce the alternative behavior.
3. Look at the structure of the environment and the activity and think about ways to prevent the behavior from happening.

HOW TO RESPOND TO UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIORS

Despite all of your teaching and preplanning, the behavior you want your child to do less often may continue. Let's take a look at three ways to respond when this happens. The three strategies we'll be discussing are 1) interruption and redirection, 2) ignoring, and 3) response cost. The first of these procedures is called interruption and redirection. Interruption and redirection is a strategy that you can use to reduce a behavior which involves some type of physical action. Interruption and redirection is a three-step procedure. The steps are:

1) interrupt your child's behavior,
2) direct your child to do the desired behavior, and
3) praise your child for doing or attempting the desired behavior.

It is important when using interruption and redirection to give no verbal attention to the behavior you want to decrease. Provide verbal attention only to the desired behavior. The benefit of using interruption and redirection is that it teaches the child what not to do with minimal attention to the misbehavior. And, just as importantly, it teaches the child what you do want her to do.

Let's look at an example of how interruption and redirection can be used to decrease a child's behavior.

Example 1.

Child	*Teacher*
At the breakfast table, the child is sitting in front of bowl of cereal and spoon, banging the spoon on the table.	*1) Interruption - the parent stops the child from banging the spoon by placing her hand on the child's hand. The parent does not comment on the banging.* *2) Redirection - the parent physically guides the child to eat with the spoon. He also verbally directs the child by saying "Eat with your spoon".* *3) Praising - the parent says "good, you are eating with your spoon".*

Example 2.

Child	*Teacher*
The child sits at a table with a puzzle and waves hand in front of eyes instead of playing with the puzzle.	*1) Interruption - parent physically stops the child from handwaving by placing her hand on the child's hands. The parent does not comment on the child's behavior.* *2) Redirection - the parent physically guides the child to play with the puzzle and verbally directs the child by saying, "Put this piece in."* *3) Praising - the parent says "You are doing a great job with that puzzle."*

There is a behavior strategy that is called extinction where you stop giving attention or rewards for a behavior that has been rewarded in the past. If you stop giving attention to the behavior, this means you ignore your child when he does the behavior. When your child's behavior has been rewarded with attention in the past and you stop giving the attention, the behavior will decrease (although, it is important to note that the behavior may increase before it begins to decrease). Read the following example:

> *Jasmine is three years old and just beginning to use some words. Ever since she was an infant, she has cried when she was hungry and her mother or father would give her some snack food. Because she is beginning to talk, her parents would like her to ask for snacks, rather than crying and area teaching her to say "eat" or name the snack she wants. Since just teaching this new skill doesn't seem to be decreasing the crying, Jasmine's parents have decided to also ignore Jasmine and turn away from her when she begins to cry for food. When she quiets down, they prompt her to say "eat".*

Jasmine's parents, in this example, are ignoring the behavior of crying which has in the past always been given attention.

It sounds easy to ignore a behavior that you would like your child to decrease. You don't have to do anything. But it's not quite that simple. There are some very important guidelines to think about before deciding to ignore a behavior.

1. Only ignore behaviors that have been rewarded with attention. Behaviors that are self-reinforcing or used to escape from a task will not be affected by extinction.
2. To effectively decrease your child's behavior, you will have to be consistent. This means if you decide to ignore a child's whining, you

will have to ignore it every time.

3. Ignoring a behavior will only work if you are in control of everything that has been reinforcing the behavior. For example, ignoring your child's loud screaming when other children are laughing and joining in with it will probably be ineffective.

4. Only use ignoring for behaviors that you can ignore. You cannot ignore behaviors if someone or something may get hurt. Also, if your child's behavior is so annoying to you that it is difficult for you to consistently ignore it, you may want to try something else.

5. When you first begin ignoring a behavior, your child may try harder to get your attention and do the behavior more often. This actually means that ignoring is working so keep it up.

6. Always reinforce the desired behavior that you would rather have your child do.

These guidelines are part of the "In A Nutshell" handout. You can refer to them when you are thinking about ignoring one of your child's behaviors.

Another type of extinction is when you stop giving a reward for a behavior that has been reinforced in the past. An example of this would be the parent that stops giving candy or treats to a child each time he whines for it at the store.

Another way to respond to a behavior you would like your child to do less often is to take away a desired object or privilege. This is called response cost. Look at the following example:

Jane and her brother John were playing with a truck, pushing it back and forth. Jane decided to stop the game and push the truck in the sandbox. John wanted a turn too, and tried to pull the truck away. Jane and John were struggling over the *truck when their father came outside to check on them. He took the truck away and said "You need to share toys." After a few minutes he gave the truck back and again reminded them to share.*

Just like adults get "fined" for speeding or teenagers get grounded for staying out too late, taking away a desired object or privilege is an effective way to respond to your child's undesirable behavior.

Again, there are some important guidelines to follow:

1. Only take away desired objects or privileges for behaviors that occur occasionally. Since taking away a desired object or privilege creates a negative interaction, a different strategy should be used for a behavior that happens more frequently.

2. The desired object or privilege that you take away should be reasonable and closely related to your child's undesirable behavior. If your child colors on the walls with crayons, you would remove the crayons rather than saying you can't go out to the playground.

3. With young children, taking away the object or privilege should occur immediately after the undesirable behavior. If you tell your child that he can't go swimming this weekend for misbehaving on Tuesday, he may not even remember why he's being punished.

4. Sometimes a child misbehaves with a toy because he does not know how to play with it. In this case, interruption and redirection would be the better strategy to try. It would help to teach the child the right way to use the toy. Taking away the toy would only teach her what not to do.

5. Always reinforce the desired behavior that you would rather have your child do.

DECIDING WHICH WAY YOU WILL RESPOND

Although there are no "hard and fast" rules for selecting a procedure for a specific child behavior, there are some guidelines that may be helpful. We said earlier that the unwanted behavior may be reinforced by 1) attention or rewards, 2) getting out of a task or activity, or 3) self reinforcement. Thinking about what is reinforcing the behavior can help you choose the best way to respond to decrease the behavior. If your child's undesirable behavior is being reinforced by attention and rewards, what could you do to decrease the behavior? So, if your child always whines to go outside, you could ignore the behavior.

If your child's undesirable behavior is being reinforced because she gets out of doing an activity or task she doesn't like, what could you do? Some answers to this question could be that you stop the behavior or take away the reinforcement. For self-reinforcing motor behaviors such as hand-waving or finger flicking, you would probably use interruption and redirection by stopping the behavior and prompting the child to do something appropriate with his hands. However when the self-reinforcing activity is something like coloring on the walls or dropping eggs on the floor, you may want to take away a reinforcer. This again is called response cost.

Summary

1. If your child's undesirable behavior is being reinforced by attention or rewards, ignoring the behavior will decrease the behavior.

2. If your child's undesirable behavior is being reinforced because he gets out of an activity or task, requiring him to complete the task will decrease the behavior.

3. If your child's undesirable behavior is self-reinforcing, ignoring the behavior will not make it happen less often. Interruption and redirection or taking away a reinforcer will decrease the behavior.

5. Always remember to reinforce desired behaviors that you would rather have your child do when you are using any strategy to decrease unwanted behavior.

A. Children continue undesirable behaviors because they are in some way reinforced.

B. Reinforcers that cause undesirable behaviors to continue include:

    1. attention and rewards
    2. escape from a task
    3. self reinforcing

C. Identifying the reinforcer that follows the undesirable behavior can help us decide what strategies to use.

D. The strategies for reducing undesirable behavior that we discussed include:

    1. interruption and redirection
    2. ignoring or extinction
    3. taking away a reinforcer/response cost

E. Always remember to reinforce desired behaviors when you are using any strategies to decrease unwanted behavior.

BRINGING IT HOME

Fill in the following information:

One behavior I would like my child to do less often is: ____________________
____
____

Why might my child continue to do this?

a. attention or a reward
b. escape from a task
c. self reinforcing

The behavior I would rather see my child do is: ____________________

____

How can I reinforce this desired behavior? ____________________

____

The strategy I can use to decrease the undesirable behavior is:

a. interruption and redirection
b. ignoring (extinction)
c. taking away a desired object or privilege (response cost)

Three things I will consider when using this strategy are:

1. ____________________
2. ____________________
3. ____________________

IN A NUTSHELL

1. Four types of behaviors that parents would typically like their children to stop or do less often are:

   a. Something that is dangerous or may result in the child hurting himself or others,
   b. Something that may result in objects, toys or other materials being damaged or destroyed
   c. Something that interferes with the child or another person's learning
   d. Something that is annoying to the parent or other children

2. Children often continue undesirable behaviors because they are reinforced in some way. Some things that may cause undesirable behaviors to continue are:

   a. Attention or rewards
   b. Escape from a task
   c. Self reinforcing activities

3. Three strategies that can be used to reduce undesirable behaviors are:

   a. Interruption and redirection
   b. Ignoring (extinction)
   c. Taking away a reinforcer (response cost)

4. Here are some things to consider when decided which strategy to use:

   a. If your child's undesirable behavior is being reinforced by attention or rewards, ignoring the behavior will decrease the behavior

   b. If your child's undesirable behavior is being reinforced because the child gets out of an activity or task, requiring the child to complete the task will decrease the behavior.

   c. If your child's undesirable behavior is self-reinforcing, ignoring the behavior will not make it happen less often. Interruption and redirection or taking away a reinforcer will decrease the behavior.

   d. Always remember to reinforce desired behaviors that you would rather have your child do when you are using any strategy to decrease undesirable behavior.

LEAP PRESCHOOL

PARENT SKILL TRAINING PROGRAM

MODULE #7: Deciding What to Teach Your Child

Main Ideas

- **Deciding What to Teach Your Child**
- **Breaking the Skill Down into Easy-to-Learn Steps**
- **Getting Ready to Teach the New Skill**

INTRODUCTION

Parent's are a child's first teacher. You teach your child the skills he needs in everyday life at home and in the community. Parents don't need training to be teachers. It comes naturally. You smile and clap your hands when your child says her first words. You gradually ask your child to do more around the house. And, you constantly introduce new experiences, new people, places and things.

Some children may need some extra help to learn the things that children their own age are typically doing. Children with developmental delays, speech delays, or sensory impairments may have difficulty learning everyday skills without a carefully designed plan for change. Such plans for change may be important for skills that you would like your child to do more often or with less assistance, or when you want your child to replace an undesirable behavior with a new skill. In the next two modules, we will be talking about how to plan to teach these skills and some general strategies for teaching your child. But first it is important to decide what skills you would like your child to learn.

DECIDING WHAT TO TEACH

How do you decide what to teach your child? Most likely you can think of a list of things you would like your child to communicate. If your child is not talking, you probably want your child to communicate. If your child is not potty trained, you may want your child to learn to use the potty. And, if your child is not feeding himself, you might want him to learn to use a spoon and a fork. But where do you start? Which skill do you teach first? What are reasonable expectations for your child?

Deciding what to teach your child is going to depend on several factors. Think about what you now have to do for your child that she may be able to learn to do for herself. Also, think about what your child would like to learn and what she is ready to learn. You may also want to think about what you could teach your child that may make your life a little easier.

The first question is "What skills do I do for my child? Just think about the many, many things that you and other adults do for your child everyday. Are there some things that your child may be able to do for himself? Skills that young children need to learn are things that children do everyday at home, at school, and in the community like walking on the sidewalk, playing with their brothers and sisters, or opening a door. There are simple skills within daily activities that your child could learn that would make her more independent. Here is an example:

> *Rodney was getting lunch ready for his four-year-old son, Derek. He picked Derek up and placed him in the chair and put a bowl and spoon and a sandwich in front of him. Rodney spooned applesauce in the bowl and put the spoon in Derek's hand. He sat next to Derek and reminded him to "take a bite" for each spoonful of applesauce and bite of sandwich. Whenever Derek dribbled on his chin, Rodney would wipe it with a napkin. And, when Derek was finished, Rodney put the applesauce, bowl, napkin and spoon away.*

There are many steps in this activity Rodney is doing for his son. If Rodney wanted to begin to teach Derek something during lunch, what two things would you suggest he begin with that would encourage Derek to become more independent? Sometimes we are so busy and get so used to doing things for our children that we forget to let them try things by themselves. A child may feel more successful if there is a task or chore or even one step of an activity that he can complete without any help.

The next thing to ask yourself is "What does my child want to learn?" Children often show what they want to learn by trying something by themselves. Young children can be very persistent when trying something new and when that interest is there, you'll be more successful in teaching the skill. If your child begins to try to manipulate the buttons on his tape player, this would be a good time to teach him how to turn it on or off. If your child loves to swing on the swing set, you could teach her to get on and off the swing by herself. Or, if your child keeps asking you to draw a smiley face, he may like to learn to draw one himself.

It is important to ask yourself "What skills is my child ready to learn?" Children naturally develop some skills before others. Typically, babies learn to crawl first, then to stand and then to walk. What would happen if you tried to teach a baby to walk before she had tried to stand? Probably both you and the baby would be very frustrated. If you try to teach a child new skill that she is just not ready for, the same thing will happen. So, think about what your child can do now to give you an idea of what your child is ready to learn. In other words, teach a skill that builds on what your child can already do. Let's think about language skills to illustrate this. Here is an example:

> *Alyssa is five years old and has been able to use one word to name and ask for toys and objects for several months. She can also name colors and shapes. Alyssa's dad, Craig, has been talking to her speech therapist to get some ideas on ways to teach her to ask for things by using at least two words. When they are playing with blocks, Craig holds all the blocks. Alyssa says, "block". Craig holds up a red block and a blue block and says "Which one? Red block or blue block?" Alyssa says "blue". Craig says "Here's a blue block." Alyssa says "blue block" as she and her dad continue to build.*

Alyssa's dad, Craig, is building on the skill of naming things by using one word by teaching Alyssa to put words together to make a phrase or sentence. There are many opportunities for you to do this throughout the day in activities such as dressing, playing, or eating. What can your child already do in these activities? If your child can put on a jacket, the next step could be to teach him to zip it. If your child has learned to use a spoon, it may be time to teach him to use a fork. If your child often plays with simple puzzles at home, more challenging puzzles may be something to try.

Now it is time to think about yourself. "What do you want your child to learn?" Are there skills your child could learn that would make your day a little easier? Teaching independence in daily activities often takes time initially, but eventually gives parents time to answer the phone, cook dinner, clean or visit with a friend. If a child is unable to keep busy with something independently, the time a parent has for these things can be very limited. Teaching a child to play with a toy, look at books, watch TV, color or do puzzles for longer periods of time may give you some time to get other things done. Independence in dressing and eating skills can also make some busy times of the day a little easier.

Sometimes parents would like children to learn skills so that they can participate in more family activities. If the parent or family enjoys are activities, they may want to teach the child gluing, pasting, cutting, and drawing. If the family enjoys going out for dinner, they may want to teach the child to stay in his seat and wait for his meal. If the family enjoys sports, they may be interested in teaching some ball skills such as throwing, catching, or kicking. Integration into community activities and the ability to join in on family hobbies, outings and errands are skills that parents often want for their children.

The last question to ask yourself when deciding what to teach your child is Are there some skills my child can do in some situations but not in others?" Let's look at this question for a moment. Sometimes children learn a new skill in a certain situation but are unable to do it at other times. For example, if you have taught your child to zip his winter coat, you may also need to teach him to zip his sweater, his pants and his sleeping bag. When a child learns a new skill it is not unusual for the skill to be done only with a certain item, person, or in a certain situation. This is particularly true for children with developmental delays. A child may clean up toys at home, but not at school. She may push a car back and forth with her sister, but not a ball with his father or his brother. Can anyone think of an example when your child learned a skill in a certain situation and did not or could not do it other times?

It is important to look for opportunities to teach priority skills throughout the day: in a variety of settings, with a variety of objects, and with a number of different people. When a child learns a skill across these different situations, it is called generalization.

In reviewing this section, here are questions a classroom staff should ask when deciding what to teach a child:

1. What do I do now for my child?
2. What does my child want to learn?
3. What is my child ready to learn?
4. What do I want my child to learn?
5. Are there skills that my child can do in some situations but not in others?

It would probably be difficult for you and your child to attempt to teach all of theseskills all at once. When deciding what you would like your child to learn, it is important to pick a few priority skills to begin with. When you and your child are more comfortable with the new skills you can begin to work on others.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

If all of this seems a little mind-boggling, remember that you won't have to make all of these decisions alone. When a child is identified as having a developmental disability, a team of people works together to decide what to teach him. This team of people is called a multidisciplinary team. It includes people that have evaluated your child, people that have experience teaching young children and, most importantly, you the parents. This team has the responsibility of carefully evaluating your child's strengths and needs and making recommendations to develop an Individual Education Plan for your child. This plan will outline what will be taught to your child, who will be responsible for teaching each skill and what types of support your child will need.

BREAKING THE SKILL DOWN

How do children learn these new skills? Most skills that children or adults learn are complicated, and they can be broken down, step by step. Breaking down a complicated skill into easy-to-learn steps is called task analysis. When you have decided what to teach your child, the next step is to break the behavior down into smaller steps. In other words, you won't expect a child to do all of the skill at once. If your child has never been asked to put on his own shirt, you may want to ask him to just pull it down over his head. When he can do that very well, you can ask him to pull it down to his waist, and so on.

To break a skill down into smaller steps, you could list the steps from memory, or actually do the behavior yourself and write down each step. You could also watch someone else do the steps and list them. You could also do the skill yourself and list the steps as you go along.

So, to break down a skill into easy to learn steps, you can 1) list the steps from memory, 2) watch someone else do the skill, or 3) do the skill yourself and list the steps as you go along. Just remember to start out easy and gradually build on what your child is able to do. This will allow your child to learn new skills without undue frustration.

CHECK IT OUT

Once you have listed the steps of the skill, you need to take a close look at which steps your child can already do. To do this, you can ask your child to do the skill and gradually give more and more help for any steps that your child is unable to do by himself. Then you can jot down how your child did next to each of the steps you've listed. You may need to do this a few times over a couple of days to get a good picture of which steps you'll need to teach.

THINK IT THROUGH

Now that you have decided what to teach, broke it down into easy to learn steps, and checked which steps your child can already do, look at your list and decide if it is a reasonable place to begin. If there are still several difficult steps involved in teaching the complex skill or if you now feel your child is just not ready to learn this new skill, you may need to step back and either break one or two of these steps down further or begin to work on a skill that is a prerequisite to learning this more complex skill. Here is an example:

> *Butch wanted to teach his five year old daughter, Dionne, to write her name. He listed the following steps to teach:*
>
> 1. *Pick up pencil.*
> 2. *Grip tightly.*
> 3. *Write a D.*
> 4. *Write an I.*
> 5. *Write an O.*
> 6. *Write an N.*
> 7. *Write an N.*
> 8. *Write an E.*
>
> ***When Butch checked Dionne's ability to do this skill, he found that she easily picked up the pencil, but could not grip it tightly or form any of the letters neatly. He decided to step back and begin to teach this skill by breaking down writing the easiest letters, I, and O, further.** Here are the new steps he decided on:*
>
> 1. *Pick up pencil.*
> 2. *Grip pencil tightly.*
> 3. *Draw a line (I).*
> 4. *Draw a circle (O)*

By thinking the steps through, you may also determine that your child can already do the skill reasonably well and your time would be well spent focussing on other skills at this time.

CONCLUSION

In summary, when you are deciding what to teach your child, here are the steps you can follow:

1) **Decide on a skill to teach.**

2) **Break it down.** Break the skill you want to teach your child down into easy to learn steps.

3) **Check it out.** Practice the skill with your child and determine which steps your child can already do and which steps you will need to teach.

4) **Think it through.** Looking at your list of steps and how your child did when you did the check, decide whether 1) your child already can do this skill, 2) this is a good place to begin with your child, 3) there is a need to break one or two of the steps down further. If you need to break some of the steps down further, just go back to step 2 (break it down) and continue through the list.

SUMMARY

1. When you are deciding what to teach your child, ask yourself these questions:

    a. What do I now do for my child?
    b. What does my child want to learn?
    c. What is my child ready to learn?
    d. What do I want my child to learn?
    e. Are there skills that my child can do in some situations but not in others?

2. Once you have decided to teach your child a new skill, follow these steps:

    a. Break it down. Break the skill you want to teach your child down into easy to learn steps.

    b. Check it out. Practice the skill with your child and determine which steps your child can already to and which steps you will need to teach.

    c. Think it through. Decide whether this is a skill you and your child are ready to work on.

BRINGING IT HOME

Decide on a skill to teach a particular child by thinking about these questions:

1. DECIDE ON A SKILL TO TEACH

What skills do I want to teach my child? ______________________

____

2. BREAK IT DOWN

How can this skill be broken down into easy to learn steps? ________

____

3. CHECK IT OUT

Practice this skill with your child.

Are there steps he/she can do already? ______________________

____

Which steps will you need to teach your child? ________________

____

4. THINK IT THROUGH

Are you and your child ready to work on this skill? If not, go back to step one and rethink what you would like to teach your child.

IN A NUTSHELL

A. Teach your child skills that you would like him/her to do more often or with less assistance or when you would like to replace undesirable behavior with a skill that is more acceptable.

B. Ask yourself the following questions to help you decide what to teach your child:

1. What skills do I do for my child?
2. What does my child want to learn?
3. What is my child ready to learn?
4. What do I want my child to learn?
5. Are there skills that my child can do in some situations but not in others?

C. Once you have decided what to teach your child, break the skill down into easy to learn steps. This is called task analysis.

D. Break it down. To break a skill down, you can:

1. List the steps from memory.
2. Watch someone else do the skill and list the steps, or
3. Do the skill yourself and list the steps as you go along.

E. Check it out. When you have the steps listed, check how well your child can do each of the steps. Practice the skill with your child giving gradually more help until you get a good idea of which steps your child can do and how much help he/she needs.

F. Think it through. Decide on whether the steps you now have listed is a reasonable place to start. If there are many difficult steps in this list, you may need to break one or two of these steps down further and teach that step before you go on to the whole skill. As you are thinking it through, you may also decide that your child does better with the skill then you thought he\she would be able to and your time would be better spent teaching a different skill.

LEAP PRESCHOOL

PARENT SKILL TRAINING PROGRAM

MODULE #8: Teaching Your Child New Skills

Main Ideas

✏Types of Assistance

✏Using Assistance to Teach New Skills

✏Choosing Easy Materials and Settings

✏Getting Your Child Interested in Learning a New Skill

INTRODUCTION

In the last module, we talked about how to decide what to teach your child and how to break complex skills down into easy to learn steps. Today, we will be looking more specifically at how to teach a new skill. In the last module, we talked about the importance of breaking a complicated skill down into smaller steps. A list of these steps is called a task analysis. The next step is to check out what your child is already able to do and which steps you will need to teach. Finally, we talked about the need to think through the list of steps you come up with and decide if it is a good place to start or if you need to break one or two of these steps down further.

CHAINING

Now that you have an idea of the steps that you would like to teach your child, what is the next step? Where should you start? It may be difficult to teach all of the steps at once. It is a good idea at this point to decide on which order you would like to teach these steps. *Pass out the Activity Sheet.* In the first part of this Activity Sheet is a list of the steps a family may use to teach the skill of putting on pants. Which step do you think would be the easiest step to teach your child? Which step do you think would be the most difficult for your child to learn? Allow time for the group to complete this section of the

Activity Sheet.

One way to plan where to start teaching is to begin with the step that would be the easiest to teach your child. This will help both you and your child feel like you accomplish something quickly. When your child is doing this step very well, you can begin with another step. The most difficult steps would be taught last. Teaching a skill step by step in this manner is called chaining. Chaining is the process of reinforcing your child for learning more and more steps of a task analysis. So, when your child has learned the easiest step in the task analysis, you will begin to require a little more. You will continue to add steps in this way until your child is able to complete all of the steps in the task analysis.

Sometimes when you begin to teach this way, the steps naturally build on each other and you will begin to teach step one then continue sequentially through the list. You may find at other times that the easiest step is the last step. In this case you could do all of the steps for your child, then let him finish up by doing the last step by himself. Finishing all by himself will give your child a sense of accomplishment. When he does the last step very well you can begin to have him do the last two steps by himself. This is another type of chaining called backward chaining. To illustrate backward chaining, think about the skill of cleaning up toys at home. If you ask your child to clean up a room that is scattered with many toys, the child may feel overwhelmed, refuse or be unable to complete the task. However, if you clean up most of the items before giving the direction to clean up, then ask your child to finish the task, you may find that she is much more successful.

ASSISTANCE

Young children sometimes need help to learn a new skill. As they learn the skill, they begin to need less and less help. The many ways that we give children help when they are learning is called assistance. Assistance is help given to your child at the same time you give her a direction or ask a question. You probably use assistance every day with your young child. Holding a child's shirt to help her put it on is another kind of assistance. And if you give her a hint like "Pick up the big block..it's red" you've used another type of assistance. Giving your child assistance helps her learn a new skill without becoming too frustrated. It will also prevent your child from learning the wrong way to do the skill or task.

We're going to talk about five types of assistance that you can use to teach your child a new skill. *Write "Types of Assistance" on the board.* The first type is called modeling. Modeling means that you show your child what to do. Has anyone ever tried to learn to knit or sew? If you were going to learn to knit from your mother or aunt, would you want her to tell you how to do it over the telephone. It may be quite frustrating to try to learn in that way. Wouldn't it be much easier to have her right there to show you what to do at each step of the way. This is modeling. Many skills can be taught to children by modeling the skill and having them watch you. Children often learn to jump, clap their hands, or use sign language by watching something else. You can also have a child watch other children in the classroom model how to do something. Pass out the Example Sheet. Listen to example number one:

> *Shawna wanted to teach her three year old daughter to scribble or draw. She had tried many times to put the chalk or crayon in Sherri's hand and physically guide her hand to draw. Sherri didn't seem very interested and rarely chose to draw when she was playing. One day, when the neighborhood children were playing outside, Shawna and Sherri was watched the children drawing with chalk on the sidewalk. Shawna placed some chalk in Sherri's hand and told her to do what the other kids were doing. Sherri enjoyed watching and imitating the other kids.*

Can anyone think of an example of how you have used modeling to teach your child a new skill? Allow time for answers.

Another type of assistance you can use with your child is a visual cue. *List "2. Visual Cue" under the heading on the board.* A visual cue is anything that you show a child so that she better understands what you want her to do. The most common type of visual cue we use with children is gesturing. An example of gesturing would be to tell your child to sit down while you are pointing to the chair. Indicating "big" with widespread arms when teaching big and little is another example of using gestures. Another way to use visual cues is to draw dots that children can trace to draw shapes or letters. Sometimes teachers use pictures to teach children the different areas in the classroom or where their cubbies or lockers are located. Can anyone think of an example of how you have used a visual cue to teach your child a new skill? Allow time for answers.

A verbal cue is another type of assistance that you can give children to teach new skills. *List "3. Verbal Cue" under the heading on the board.* One type of verbal cue is any 'hint' that you may give your child to help him learn a new skill. For example, if you wanted to teach your child the names of different colors, you might point to the color red and say "What color is this? Say re..." Another way to use a verbal cue as a hint is to exaggerate or emphasize an important word. For example, you might say to your child, "Point to the RED balloon" while exaggerating the word red. For example, you could comment "This is a red car" then ask "What color is this?" Can anyone think of a way that you have used verbal cues to teach your child a skill? Allow time for answers.

The next type of assistance we'll be talking about is physical assistance. *List "4. Physical assistance" under the heading on the board.* Physical assistance means helping a child by physically guiding him with your hands or body. There are many different levels of physical assistance you can use with your child. Sometimes you will need to use full physical assistance by placing your hands over your child's to guide him through the skill. One example of this would be to place your hands over your child's hands to help him pull up his pants. Full physical assistance is the most assistance you can give your child. It is used when your child is not familiar with doing the skill you are teaching him. Full physical assistance helps him practice the movements required to do a skill.

There are some skills that your child may be somewhat familiar with which you may begin teaching with partial instead of full physical assistance. This partial physical assistance helps to make sure your child does not fail at a new skill. For example, if you began to teach your child to eat with a fork by using full physical assistance, the next step may be to give less help. It is important to gradually fade how much help you are giving your child rather than withdrawing the assistance all at once. So, you can use less assistance, but still help by placing your hand on your child's arm or wrist and very lightly guiding her through the skill. In other words, your hand is there to help when necessary, but your child is beginning to do the skill on her own.

Another common example of how we use physical assistance is when teaching a child to ride a bike. At first, balancing the bike is for a child so the adult gives full assistance for balancing while the child is getting used to pedaling and steering. As the child's balance skills improve, the parent uses partial physical assistance to balance the bike only when needed. This partial physical assistance may start as having both hands on the bike and gradually fade to the point where the parent is running behind the child, ready to catch him and help balance if necessary. Can anyone think of an example of how you have used physical assistance to teach your child a new skill? Allow time for answers.

To summarize, the types of assistance are:

1) Modeling (showing your child what to do)
2) Visual cues (showing your child something that helps him understand what to do)
3) Verbal cues (telling your child something that helps him understand what to do)
4) Physical assistance (using your hands or body to help your child do the skill)

USING ASSISTANCE

When you have decided to teach your child a new skill, think about how you will help your child learn the skill. If your child is unable to do the skill now, you will need to plan to use some type of assistance. For example, if your child has never set the table and you would like him to learn this skill, simply saying "David, set the table" may not be enough to teach him. You could physically guide him, model for him, use placemats with outlines as a visual cue, or give verbal directions for each place setting. Choosing a type of assistance will be based on what you are teaching, how much of the skill your child can already do, and what type of assistance you and your child are most comfortable with. Here are a few other guidelines to remember about using assistance: (These guidelines are also listed in the "In a Nutshell" handout that you'll be getting at the end):

1. *Assistance can be used for the first step of a skill or for each step. For example, if you are teaching your child to put several toys away, you might model putting one toy away as you give your child the direction "Put the toys away". After you have modeled once, you may be able to just give the verbal direction or to use the visual cue of pointing to each toy.*

2. *If you are teaching a task that involves a series of different steps, such as toothbrushing, you may need to use several different types of assistance throughout. For example, you may be able to point to the toothbrush as you tell your child to pick up his toothbrush, but you may need to use full physical assistance to help the child brush his teeth.*

3. *Use only the amount of assistance that is needed. The amount of assistance that you use should be enough to allow your child to successfully complete the task without frustration, but not so much that there is not learning or challenge involved.*

4. *Gradually fade your assistance as your child begins to learn the skills. In other words, gradually reduce the amount of assistance or the type of assistance that you give your child as she learns to do the skill. Slowly fading your assistance will ensure that your child continues to do the skill correctly, but will encourage the child to be more independent.*

5. *Sometimes you will have to use extra assistance if your child does not respond, incorrectly responds, or attempts but is unable to correctly respond to your direction. This extra assistance is sometimes called a correction procedure. For example, you may ask your child to take a bite of food as you point to his plate (a visual cue). If your child does not take a bite within several seconds, you might decide to physically guide his hand to take a bite. The physical assistance, in this example, is used to help your child learn the correct response. When you use extra assistance, the end result should be that your child responds correctly. Make sure that you give your child plenty of time to respond before you give the extra assistance. And, make the additional assistance positive by emphasizing the correct response. In other words, instead of saying "No that's not where you put the fork" you can say "That fork goes over here."*

CHOOSING EASY MATERIALS OR SETTINGS

Sometimes the simplest way to teach a new skill is to choose easy materials or settings. One example of this would be to allow your child to practice dressing by putting on a pair of Daddy's large socks rather than struggling with snug fitting socks. Using a large ball to teach catching may be easier than a smaller tennis ball. Your child may learn a new skill in a quiet room, rather than in a noisy, distracting setting. Catching from two feet away would be easier than catching a ball thrown from 10 feet away. And, it would be easier for a child to "find the red crayon" from choice of two rather than from a whole box of crayons. Here's another example:

> *Four year old Carly was always on the move. She would begin to play with a toy, but within one minute would lose interest and move on to something else. Her mother, Natalie, has been trying to teach her to keep her attention on one toy or activity for longer periods of time. Natalie has decided that to begin to teach this, she is going to need to really structure the situation. Each night, right after dinner, Natalie has Carly sit at a table. Natalie stands right behind her so Carly scoot her chair away. Natalie sets up Carly's favorite puzzle with only three pieces not finished. Natalie verbally prompts Carly to finish the last three pieces and put the puzzle away. Although this only takes a Carly about a minute, Natalie plans to gradually increase the number of pieces, length of time, and types of toys Carly will play with at this time. Once Carly is able to play for longer periods of time in this structured activity, Natalie will set up the puzzle and other toys at less structured times.*

Sometimes it is necessary to teach a child a new skill in a more structured, less distracting situation. Setting up this very structured play time for Carly is an example of this. Of course, when your child is able to use the easier materials or setting to do the new skill, you can gradually make it more natural, and less structured. Can anyone think of a skill that you taught your child by choosing easy materials or settings? Allow time for answers. Here are a few of the ways you can choose easier materials:

1. Use materials that are easier (larger, stretchier, simpler)
2. Give fewer choices when asking your child to discriminate between materials (two crayons instead of a whole box)
3. Position your child and yourself to make the skill easier (get closer when teaching the child to catch)
4. Make sure the setting isn't too distracting (turn off TV, go to quiet area, etc)

THINK ABOUT WHEN TO TEACH

The time of day that you choose to teach a skill to your child is another thing to think about. Whenever possible, teach skills when it is natural for them to happen. Teaching a child to zip his coat when he doesn't really need a coat on may be confusing and uncomfortable for the child. It also may give you a false sense of whether or not the child can really do the skill. A child may easily answer yes/no questions in a one-to-one teaching situation, but not be able to when you ask him if he wants spaghetti for dinner or if he played on the slide at school today. It may be better to teach the skill of answering yes/no questions throughout the day whenever it is needed.

Sometimes it is too difficult to teach a skill in the natural environment. As mentioned earlier, you may need to teach the skill in a less distracting situation or when you are not as busy. For example, although the best time for your child to learn to dress himself would be when he needs to get dressed for school in the morning, this can often be a very rushed and confusing time for your family. Another time that is natural for dressing to happen would be at bedtime. This may be an easier time to teach this skill. The second thing to think about is the time of day. Think about this example:

> ***Kenneth wanted to teach his son, Joel, to turn pages in a book. He decided he would use his son's favorite book and that Joel would have to turn the page for his father to keep reading. He began to teach this at bedtime. Every night, Joel would end up crying and whining through the whole book.***

Why do you think it was difficult for Joel to learn this skill at bedtime? Children are often very tired at the end of the day. Teaching skills at this time can be very difficult. It is best to teach skills when your child is not tired. Sometimes it is difficult to work these suggestions into your plans for teaching your child. How can you teach dressing skills in the morning before school when you just don't have time? Or, how can you spend the time teaching your child to play with toys independently at meal preparation time when you are busy watching two other children and preparing dinner?

GETTING A CHILD INTERESTED IN LEARNING A SKILL

Another thing to consider when deciding when to teach children certain skills is to use motivating materials or activities. One way to do this is to use a child's favorite activity, toy, or character to get him interested in the new skill. Your child may enjoy trying to dress herself in a sweatshirt or underpants that have pictures of her favorite cartoon character on them. Or, if your child loves to do puzzles and you want to teach him to name shapes, you might get him a puzzle with shapes in it. It may be easier to teach a child who loves to jump to jump onto pictures, colors, or shapes rather than pointing to them. Books about other children learning or doing the skill may also increase a child's interest. Many parents use children's books and videos about potty training to get children interested in learning to use the toilet.

Sometimes just setting up materials in an interesting way will get your child interested. Setting paints, paper and water out on a table may make it more likely that a child will be interested in art than if these materials are put away in a box on a shelf. If a child saw Mr. Potato Head and all of the parts out on a table it would be more likely that he would initiate putting the parts together than if all of the parts were put away out of sight. It will be easier for your child to choose what to play with and keep himself busy when toys are put away neatly on shelves or in bins than when they are all thrown into a large box. When your child is unable to choose or plan what to play with, you may need to remind her of what is available by setting the toys out or organizing them neatly.

Because your child will learn a skill best if you teach when he is interested and initiates trying a skill, there are some ways to set up this interest to give you more opportunities to teach in a natural setting. If you provide your child with plenty of opportunities to observe others doing the skill, your child may try to imitate it. For example, if you would like to teach your son to use the potty, you may allow him to watch his father and brothers whenever possible. A child may also learn to play appropriately with certain toys by watching other children at play group or at the park. If you would like your child to say "Thank you" when he is given something, he may learn to do this faster if he hears others doing it more frequently.

Doing these three things; using motivating materials, setting up materials in an interesting way, and providing your child with opportunities to observe others, will make it more likely that your child will initiate in learning the skill. Now you'll be able to, when possible, wait until your child is interested in the materials or in doing the skill. Here is an example:

> ***Marilyn decided to teach her daughter, Maura, to ask other children to play with her. One day Maura was playing with her favorite music box. Marilyn said "Maura, ask Jacob to play with you." Maura began to cry because she didn't want Jacob to play with her music box. Later that day, Maura was playing on the swingset outside. When she began to get on the seesaw, Marilyn again said "Maura, ask Jacob to play with you." Maura did ask Jacob and the two children had fun playing together on the seesaw.***

Does anyone have an idea of why Maura responded differently in these two situations? Give time for answers.

The music box is difficult to share both because it is a one person toy and because it seems to be Maura's favorite, "special" toy. Maura is probably less interested in other children playing with her when she is playing with this type of a toy. There are many games or toys, like the seesaw, that actually require another child to make it easier for Maura to learn this skill. If you have your child's interest in the activity or materials you are going to use to teach a skill, your child may learn the skill more effectively. So, it may be more effective to have Maura ask another child to play when she is interested in a ball or a board game.

Does anyone know of other ways to get children interested in learning certain skills? Allow time for answers.

BRINGING IT HOME

Pass out the "Bringing it Home" handout for this session. Go over the directions and discuss responses of those parents that wish to share the information.

SUMMARY

Summarize the session by reviewing the following:

A) Begin by teaching your child the easiest step. When she is doing that step very well, begin to teach the next step. This is called chaining.

B) When you give your child some type of help at the same time you give her a direction or ask a question you are using assistance.

C) The types of assistance we discussed were:
   1. Modeling - show your child what to do
   2. Visual Cues - showing your child something that helps her understand what to do
   3. Verbal Cues - telling your child something that helps him understand what to do
   4. Physical Assistance - using your hands or body to help your child do the skill

D) Sometimes the simplest way to teach a new skill is to choose easy materials or settings.

E) Teach skills when it is natural for them to happen and when your child is not tired.

F) Get your child interested in learning a skill by having her observe others doing the skill, using motivating materials, or setting up materials in an interesting way.

IN A NUTSHELL

Refer parents to the "In a Nutshell" handout. Suggest to parents that they read over the handout as an additional review and that they share the information with family members, other caregivers, and interested friends.

PARTICIPANT'S PACKET

Activity Sheet **Module: Teaching Your Child New Skills**

I. Here are the steps you could use for teaching the skill of putting on pants:

1. Sit on floor
2. Pull one leg of pants over foot
3. Pull other leg of pants over foot
4. Stand up
5. Pull to hips
6. Pull over hips
7. Zip pants'
8. Snap pants

Answer the following questions:

Which step do you think would be the easiest for your child to learn? ______
____

Which step would you teach next? ______________________________
____

In what order would you teach the rest of the steps? ______________________________
____
____
____
____

What type(s) of assistance would you use to teach your child this skill? ______
____
____
____
____
____

How would you fade this assistance? ____________________________________

____

____

____

____

____

PARTICIPANT'S PACKET

Example Sheet **Module: Teaching Your Child New Skills**

1. Shawna wanted to teach her three year old daughter to scribble or draw. She had tried many times to put the chalk or crayon in Sherri's hand and physically guide her hand to draw. Sherri didn't seem very interested and never really chose to draw when she was playing. One day, when the neighborhood children were playing outside, Shawna and Sherri watched the children drawing with chalk on the sidewalk. Shawna placed some chalk in Sherri's hand and told her to do what the other kids were doing. Sherri enjoyed watching and imitating the other kids.

2. Three year old Carly was always on the move. She would begin to play with a toy, but within one minute would lose interest and move on to something else. Her mother, Natalie, has been trying to teach her to keep her attention on one toy or activity for longer periods of time. Natalie has decided that to begin to teach this she is going to need to really structure the situation. Each night, right after dinner, Natalie has Carly sit at a table. Natalie stands right behind her so Carly can't scoot her chair away. Natalie sets up Carly's favorite puzzle with only three pieces not finished. Natalie verbally prompts Carly to finish the last three pieces and put the puzzle away. Though this only takes Carly about a minute, Natalie plans to gradually increase the number of pieces, length of time and types of toys Carly will play with at this time.. Once Carly is able to play for longer periods of time in this structured activity. Natalie will set up the puzzle and other toys at less structured times.

3. Kenneth wanted to teach his son, Joel, to turn pages in a book. He decided he would use his son's favorite book and that Joel would have to turn the page for his father to keep reading. He began to teach this at bedtime. Every night, Joel would end up crying and whining

through the whole book.

4. Marilyn decided to teach her daughter, Maura, to ask other children to play with her. One day, Maura was playing with her favorite music box. Marilyn said, "Maura, ask Jacob to play with you." Maura began to cry because she didn't want Jacob to play with her music box. Later that day, Maura was playing on the swingset. When she began to get on the seesaw, Marilyn again asked, "Maura, ask Jacob to play with you." Maura did ask Jacob and the two children had fun playing together on the seesaw.

PARTICIPANT'S PACKET

Bringing it Home Module: Training Your Child New Skills

Fill in the following information:

A skill that I would like to teach my child is ______________________________

____

Here's how I could break this skill down into easy to learn steps:

____

____

____

____

____

____

The easiest step for my child to learn would be:

____

I will teach the rest of the steps in this order:

____

____

____

____

____

I will use the following type(s) of assistance:

____

____

Here's how I will fade the assistance:

Here are other strategies:
-choose easy materials or settings
-teach skills when it is natural for them to happen
-provide opportunities for the child to observe others doing the skill
-use motivating materials
-set up materials in an interesting way

Here are some ways I may use these strategies to teach this skill:

PARTICIPANT'S PACKET

In a Nutshell **Module: Teaching Your Child New Skills**

A. Begin by teaching your child the easiest step. When he is doing that step very well, begin to teach the next step. This is called chaining.

B. When you give your child some type of help at the same time you give her a direction or ask a question you are using assistance.

C. The types of assistance we discussed were:
 1. Modeling - showing your child what to do
 2. Visual Cues - showing your child something that helps her understand what to do
 3. Verbal Cues - telling your child something that helps him understand what to do
 4. Physical Assistance - Using your hands or body to help your child do the skill

D. Choosing a type of assistance will be based on what you are teaching, how much of the skill your child can already do, and what type of assistance you and your child are most comfortable with.

E. Here are some other guidelines for using assistance:
1. Assistance can be used for the first step of a skill or for each step. For example, if you are teaching your child to put several toys away, you might model putting one toy away as you give your child the direction "Put the toys away". After you have modeled once, you may be able to just give the verbal direction or to use the visual cue of

pointing to each toy.

2. If you are teaching a task that involves a series of different steps, such as putting on shoes, you may need to use several different types of assistance throughout. For example, you may be able to point to the shoe as you tell your child to pick up his shoe, but you may need to use full physical assistance to help your child brush his teeth.

3. Use only the amount of assistance that is needed. The among to assistance that you use should be enough to allow your child to successfully complete the task without frustration, but not so much that there is no learning or challenge involved.

4. Gradually fade your assistance as the child begins to learn the skills. In other words, gradually reduce the amount of assistance or the type of assistance that you give your child as she learns to do the skill. Slowly fading your assistance will ensure that your child continues to do the skill correctly, but will encourage your child to do more and more independently.

5. Sometimes you will have to use more assistance if your child does not respond, incorrectly responds, or attempts but is unable to correctly respond to your direction. Here are some things to consider when giving more assistance:

   a. Give your child plenty of time to respond before you give more assistance. You want your child to try what you've asked and have a chance to do it with the least amount of assistance. But, at the same time, you don't want your child to get frustrated or practice a wrong response. Five to ten seconds is usually a good amount of time to wait before giving more assistance.

   b. Emphasize the correct response. Rather than saying "no, that's not right" tell your child what the right response is. Emphasizing the correct response is much more positive.

F. Sometimes the simplest way to teach a new skill is to choose easy materials or settings. Here are some things to consider:

1. Use materials that are easier - a larger ball to teach catching, a stretchier jacket to teach dressing, or a game with fewer steps to teach turn taking.

2. Give fewer choices when asking your child to discriminate between materials - show two crayons instead of a whole box when asking your child to "find the red crayon".

3. Position yourself and your child to make the skill easier - get closer

when teaching your child to catch - stay close to the child to encourage them to complete an activity.

4. Make sure the setting isn't too distracting - perhaps try a quiet area of the room.

G. Teach skills when it is natural for them to happen and when the child is not tired

H. Get your child interested in learning a skill by:

1. having her observe others doing the skill
2. using motivating materials, or
3. setting up materials in an interesting way

LEAP PRESCHOOL

PARENT SKILL TRAINING PROGRAM

MODULE #9: Encouraging Your Child to Communicate

Main Ideas

- ✏**Recognition of Different** Means of **Communication**
- ✏**Identify the Different** Types of **Communication**
- ✏**Identify Strategies for Encouraging Communication**
- ✏Environmental **Strategies** to Encourage **Communication**
- ✏**Incidental Teaching**

Introduction

Many preschool children in early intervention have needs in the area of language and communication. They need to learn to communicate with their family, friends, and teachers. Some children have goals that they will learn to say words or use words in sentences while others may be working on developing different types of communication such as using sign language or pictures. Some children may even need to work on the most basic level of showing an interest in communicating. In each of these situations, communication skills are best learned in natural everyday situations rather than in formalized, one to one or group instruction.

Families are in an ideal situation to encourage young children to communicate. Because parents and siblings are the people that are with young children the most, they have the most opportunities to teach language skills. Also, young children will often respond best to the people with whom they are most familiar. Families are well equipped to teach young children to communicate and they do this in very natural ways without thinking about it. Your child needs to learn to communicate about the objects, people, and situations that are within your home and your family's routine.

HOW YOUR CHILD COMMUNICATES:

When we talk about communication, it is important to realize that there are many ways to communicate. Read through all of the examples in Part 1.

1. *Alexa cries. Her mother gives her Cheerios.*
2. *Darnell reaches toward a jar of peanut butter on a high shelf. His dad makes him a sandwich.*
3. *Courtney gives her brother a picture of an apple. Her brother gives her an apple.*
4. *Jesse says, "I'm really hungry, could I please have a cookie?" Her grandma gives her a cookie.*

What message were all these children communicating, and in what ways did the children communicate?

The types of communication given in these examples are: 1) pointing to an object, 2) giving someone an object, 3) using gestures or signs, 4) vocalizes, and 5) uses one word.

Each of the caregivers understood and responded appropriately to the message, even though only one of the children used words to get his message across. It is important to encourage communication, whether verbal or nonverbal. Think about how your child currently communicates and encourage continued and increased communication right at or slightly above that level.

This list of ways a child communicates gets gradually more complex. Children often use different means of communication in different situations or even with different people. A child may be very talkative at home, but may use pointing or whining to communicate in an unfamiliar, crowded or noisy situation.

Children also often combine different communicative means in a single message. For example, a child may cry, reach for the door and vocalize when she wants to go outside.

WHY YOUR CHILD COMMUNICATES

Just as there are different ways for a child to get a message across, there are many reasons that children communicate each day. So far, we have mainly been talking about the first reason your child communicates which is to **request**. To request means to ask another person for something. Children use requesting to ask for things that they need or want. Food, toys, attention, comfort, particular people, activities or motivating objects may be requested by using any of the ways to communicate we have already talked about.

Children also communicate to **protest**. When a child indicates that he doesn't like or doesn't want something, this is a protest. A child may also push something away, say or sign "no" or show a picture of the word "no".

Children also protest in undesirable ways. Yelling "no", throwing something, screaming, or hitting someone are some undesirable ways children protest. These undesirable behaviors will often decrease when a child is taught appropriate ways to protest.

Another reason children communicate is to **comment**. To comment means to tell about something you see or something you are doing. A child's comment may be one or two words such as "Look birdie" or "big truck". Or the comment can be more complex such as, "I'm putting the little boy in the dollhouse". Some examples of non-verbal types of commenting are a child pointing to an airplane in the sky, a child signing "big" when a big truck goes by, or a child showing his dad the painting he made.

The next reason a child communicates we'll talk about is to **answer simple questions**. Someone asks the child a question and the child responds in some way. Look at the following examples:

> *His mom asks Troy, "What do you want for breakfast?" Troy goes to the cupboard and gets out the Rice Krispies.*
>
> *Her brother asks Angela, "Do you want to watch Winnie the Pooh?" Angela nods her head "yes".*
>
> *Davey asks Kara "What did you do at school today?" Kara say "Play cars".*

There are many types of questions that you can ask a child. Some of the types of questions include:

Making a choice - *"Do you want the red shirt or the blue shirt?"*
Affirming or denying *(yes/no) - "Did you break this toy?" or "Do you like juice?"*
Asking about past events - *"What did you do today?"*
Asking about concepts - *"What color is this?"*

A child may also **ask questions** to communicate. The child may ask someone for information ("Where's Daddy?", "What are we doing today?" and "Why do birds sing?") are some verbal examples of asking questions. Non-verbally a child may point to something as if to say "What's that?" or bring you a picture of her grandma as if to say "Where's Grandma?"

We often begin to teach a child to talk by asking him to label objects (in other words to answer the question "What is this?"). Although this is a nice skill for children to have, we must not stop there. Labeling objects is a very concrete skill which some children can learn very quickly. It may seem that the child is progressing rapidly in communication when he is able to name a lot of objects. We must remember that this is only one type of communication. When a child is asked too many questions, there is less opportunity for him to initiate the conversation. Because he is being asked questions, most of his communication is for one reason, to answer questions. We want children to realize that they can communicate for many reasons.

WHEN AND WHERE YOUR CHILD COMMUNICATES

When is the best time to teach communication? When does your child want or need to communicate? The answer to these questions is the same. The best time to teach communication to a child is when the child wants or needs to communicate. This might be at 6:00 AM, at 12 noon, or at 8:00 in the evening. Your child may need to request comfort in the middle of the night, or tell you about her playdoh sculpture while you are making dinner at 5:30 PM. These are teaching opportunities.

The answer to "where can you teach communication?" is similar. Teach communication where your child needs or wants to communicate. In the living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom or bathroom; at home, at the park, at church, in the car or at the store; these are the places where you can teach your child to communicate.

RESPONSIVE STRATEGIES FOR ENCOURAGING COMMUNICATION

The three rules to remember are:

1) WATCH
2) WAIT
3) FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD

The methods for encouraging communication will be most effective if you remember these three steps: 1. WATCH - watch to see what your child is interested in and watch for signs that your child is communicating with you. 2. WAIT - don't talk or ask questions for a few moments to give your child a chance to initiate communication (at least 5 seconds). 3. FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD - talk about and play with the materials that your child is interested in.

It often seems that the most difficult of these steps is WAIT. It is so natural to want to fill in the silence with talking or asking questions. But be careful; allow your child plenty of time to initiate conversation and respond to your conversation.

MIRRORING

If your child vocalizes or does something with a toy or object while you are WATCHing and WAITing, you can **mirror** what he/she says or does. This is the first strategy for encouraging communication that we will be discussing. **Mirroring means to imitate what the child says or does**. This is very effective with children that are not yet saying words. It shows your child that his/her vocalizations and play behaviors are important to you and gives him/her a chance to participate in a "conversation". If your child squeals with delight, you squeal. If she pushes a car, you push a car and if she claps her hands, you clap your hands. If she says "ba ba ba" you say "ba ba ba". Once you get into a mirroring activity with your child, you can alter it slightly to see if the child will imitate you. This can work particularly well with a mirroring activity that involves vocalizations or verbalizations.

TURN TAKING

Mirroring is one example of the next strategy - **turn taking**. **Turn taking means developing a pattern of conversation or behaviors in which you and the child alternate saying or doing things.** The best examples of turn taking have both partners, you and your child, involved with the same materials or talking about the same topic. Although this may be difficult at first, the turn taking partners should be paying attention to each other. Taking turns can be done with verbalizations or vocalizations or by physical actions. It is important to share control of the turn taking by letting your child decide what to do or talk about as often as you do.

REFLECTING

If your child is just beginning to use words or combine words, the strategy of **reflecting** may be helpful. **Reflecting means encouraging your child's attempts to communicate by repeating them back to him.** If your child uses incorrect pronunciations, you can model the correct way to say it without calling attention to the error. Here's an example: Krystal pushes a car and says "tar doe". Her mom says "Yes, the car goes." Notice that her mother did not say "no, don't say tar say car", but simply repeated it back, using the appropriate pronunciation.

Children that are learning to use pictures or sign language to communicate also can benefit from the strategy of reflecting. When your child gives you the picture of a ball to ask for a ball, you can say "Oh you want the ball."

EXPANSION

If you add more words to your child's message, you are using the next strategy, **expansion**. A child can learn new concepts or more elaborate sentence structure when her message is expanded. When you add more words to what your child says, try to increase the language level only slightly. Here are some examples:

Gretchen: "Shirt on."
Mom: "Blue shirt on."

Malcom: "Baby eat."
Dad: "The baby eats cereal."

Zach: "Fall down."
Grandpa: "Oh, you fell down and hurt your knee."

SELF TALK

The next strategy is **self talk**, which means talking about what you are doing, thinking, or feeling. Use self talk that is at or slightly more advanced than your child's current language level. If your child is not talking, use 1 or

2 word descriptions such as "Book", "Big ball", or "Mommy's eating". If your child uses 1 or 2 word phrases you can use 3 or 4 word phrases such as "Daddy's making dinner" "It is hot today" or "I'm drawing a cat".

PARALLEL TALK

Parallel talk is similar to self talk except you describe what your child is doing, seeing, or feeling. Again, the descriptions you use should be at or slightly above your child's current language level. If your child is playing with blocks, you might say "Block on" or "Oops" the blocks fell down". If he/she is playing with dinosaurs, you could say "The big dinosaur is fighting with the little dinosaur". This strategy of parallel talk is also helpful when your child is not yet able to express feelings of sadness, frustration, or anger. "I know you fell sad when we can't find your blanket" or "You are angry. Jason took your doll."

Commenting about what you and your child are doing are great strategies for language enrichment. However, just as with questions, you must use it sparingly with long pauses between statements to give your child plenty of time to respond or initiate conversation.

ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION

There is another group of strategies for increasing opportunities for communication that are called **environmental strategies**. **Environmental**

strategies involve arranging something about the setting or materials you and your child are using to make it more likely that your child will need or want to communicate. These environmental strategies are used during situations that are part of an established routine and work best when your child understands that routines have predictable sequence of events. When your child is highly motivated by the materials and routines that are being arranged, he will be more likely to communicate with you.

FORGETFULNESS

The first environmental strategy we'll look at is called **forgetfulness**. This is where you purposefully "forget" to provide everything that is needed for an activity. Your child will then need to use some type of communication to let you know that you forgot. Look at this example:

> *Kirk wanted to paint. He gave his mom a picture of paint to let her know. His mom, Grace, set up an easel with paper and three jars of paint. She did not give Kirk any paintbrushes. Grace told Kirk, "Go ahead, you can paint now", and went into the kitchen. Kirk looked around for the brushes, then went into the kitchen to get his mom. He pulled on her hand. Grace gave him an expectant look as if she didn't understand what he needed. Finally, Kirk found the picture of paintbrushes and give it his mom. Grace said "Oh you need paintbrushes" and gave them to Kirk.*

Other examples include giving your child applesauce with no spoon or putting her in the bathtub with no water. For some children, you may need to be close by and/or holding the necessary material.

VISIBLE BUT UNREACHABLE

Another environmental strategy is called **visible but unreachable**. For this strategy you can place an object that your child needs or wants, is out of reach, but is still within sight. Desired objects can be placed on a high shelf or in a locked, see-through cabinet. For example, you can place snacks on top of the refrigerator or put bath toys in a net bag hanging from the shower head. Here again, your child will need to initiate an interaction with you to get the object she wants. A similar strategy is to introduce an interesting toy or object to your child that he needs help with. He will need to ask you for help in some way. For example, show your child a wind up toy that he cannot wind up or tell a child who needs help with his/her shoes to get them on before going outside. It is common for adults to get into the habit of knowing ahead about what their children need or want and giving it to them before they ask. If we wait before providing for our children's needs and wants, we can use these motivating situations to give children plenty of opportunities to communicate.

VIOLATE EXPECTATIONS/SABOTAGE

Another way to encourage your child to initiate communication is to **violate expectations**. In other words, do something silly. Try to put a doll's shoe on your child's foot, or put a sock on his hand. Some other examples would be to give your child a marker without taking the lid off. Your child might try to protest or try to fix the situation and you can encourage this type of communication. **Sabotage** is a similar strategy. Sabotage is used by deliberately interfering with an activity. For example, you might hide the peanut butter, then ask your child to get it off of the shelf. Or, you might give your child a toy car that has a broken wheel. This strategy encourages your child to try to solve the problem or ask you for your help.

PIECE BY PIECE

The next type of environmental arrangement is called **piece by piece**. This works well with toys that have many pieces like lego blocks or puzzles or with small snack foods such as small pretzels or raisins. You can encourage your child to ask for each piece as you hold it back from him or give just a small amount of snack so your child needs to "ask" for more. You may initiate a "piece by piece" routine by giving the child a couple of pieces with no demands. Then, on the third or fourth piece, hold it back to wait for communication.

INCIDENTAL TEACHING

Once you arrange the environment to encourage communication, you have set up a teaching opportunity. Now to make the most of this opportunity, let's look at some strategies you can use to prompt the type of communication you want from your child.

First, think about the environmental arrangement strategies we have discussed. They all involve setting up a situation where your child needs or wants to tell you or ask you something. She may point to or say something, but you would like the communication to be more sophisticated or complex.

Here are the steps you can follow:

1. Set up the environment.
2. Wait 5 seconds with an expectant expression on your face. If your child initiates at an appropriate language level, repeat what she says, expand on it, praise her and/or give her the object.
3. If your child does not initiate, you may ask a question or make an open-ended statement (e.g. "What do you want?" or "Oh you want a...") If your child responds, give the object while repeating, expanding, and/or praising.
4. Step 2 can be repeated **one** time. You may ask the same question or change to a simpler one.
5. If your child does not respond, tell her what to say (e.g. "Say cookie please"). If your child responds correctly, give the object while repeating, expanding, and/or praising.
6. If your child does not respond, state the desired response and if appropriate, give the desired object. (At this point, if your child uses sign language or pictures to communicate, you can physically prompt the correct response).

Here are two examples:

1. *Maggie placed her daughter Kim's favorite book in a clear plastic bag and closed it tightly with a twist tie. ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY - VISIBLE BUT UNREACHABLE*

   When Kim found the book, she brought it into the living room and gave it to her. REQUEST - GIVES THE OBJECT

Maggie only looked at Kim with an expectant look on her face and waited 5 seconds -STEP 1.

When Kim did not respond, Maggie asked "What do you want?" and waited 5 seconds - STEP 2.

Kim still did not respond so Maggie said "You want me to ___." STEP 3

Kim did not respond. Maggie said "Say 'read book'". -STEP 4.

Kim did not respond. Maggie said "Read book" and read the book to Maggie - STEP 5

2. *Rodger gave his son Gabe a bowl of soup with no spoon ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY - FORGETFULNESS*

Gabe looked at Rodger and said "soup" REQUEST - USES ONE WORD

Rodger looked at Gabe expectantly STEP 1

Gabe said "soup"

Rodger said "Here's your soup. Do you need something else?" STEP 2

Gabe did not respond.

Rodger said "You need a spoon? Say 'spoon'" STEP 4

Gabe said "poon"

Rodger said "Oh you need a soup spoon." and gave him one. EXPANSION

CONCLUSION

Communication includes a variety of skills that are important for young children to learn. For a child's communication to be functional, for her to be able to use it in many environments and with many different people, it must be taught in everyday situations. Responsive, environmental and incidental teaching strategies are the strategies that are designed to be used in these everyday situations.

SUMMARY

Think about the following:

1. How your child communicates:
    - a. whines/cries
    - b. reaches towards object
    - c. points to object
    - d. gives the object
    - e. uses gestures or sign language
    - f. shows a picture of the object
    - g. vocalizes
    - h. uses one word
    - i. uses phrase or sentence
2. Why your child communicates:
    - a. to request
    - b. to protest
    - c. to comment
    - d. to answer questions
    - e. to ask questions
3. Your child communicates when and where he needs or wants to communicate. This can be early in the morning, in the afternoon or after dinner. It can be at home, at the park, or while you are shopping.
4. The three steps to remember to encourage your child to communicate are:
    - a. WATCH
    - b. WAIT
    - c. FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD
5. Some strategies for encouraging communication are:
    - a. mirroring
    - b. turn-taking
    - c. reflecting

   d. expanding
   e. self-talk
   f. parallel talk

6. Environmental strategies for encouraging communication involve arranging the setting or materials you and your child are using to make it more likely that your child will need to or want to communicate. Some of these strategies are:

   a. forgetfulness
   b. visible but unreachable
   c. violate expectations/sabotage
   d. piece by piece

7. Incidental teaching involves setting up the environment then following these steps to prompt the appropriate communication.

   a. set up the environment
   b. wait 5 seconds with an expectant expression on your face
   c. if your child does not respond, ask a question or make an open-ended statement
   d. repeat or rephrase the question or statement
   e. tell your child what to say
   f. say the appropriate response and give the desired object

BRINGING IT HOME

Answer the following questions:

1. List three activities (or materials) that your child enjoys:

2. Think about the environmental strategies listed here:
   - forgetfulness
   - visible but reachable
   - violate expectations
   - sabotage
   - piece by piece

Choose one of the activities your child enjoys and describe how you can use one of the environmental strategies to encourage communication during that activity.

3. Think about the strategies for encouraging communication listed here:

   - mirroring
   - turn-taking
   - reflecting
   - expanding
   - self-talk
   - parallel talk

Choose one of the activities your child enjoys and describe how you could use one of these strategies to encourage communication using one of these strategies:

IN A NUTSHELL

1. Your child communicates in many ways and communicates for many reasons.

2. Your child communicates when and where he/she needs or wants to communicate. The best time to teach communication skills is when and where your child needs or wants to communicate.

3. The three steps to remember to encourage your child to communicate are:

   a. WATCH - to see what your child is interested in and watch for signs that the child is communicating with you.
   b. WAIT - don't talk or ask questions for a few moments to give your child a chance to initiate communication (at least 5 seconds).
   c. FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD - talk about and play with the materials that the child is interested in.

4. Some strategies for encouraging communication are:

   a. mirroring - imitate what your child says or does
   b. turn-taking - developing a pattern of conversation or behaviors in which you and your child alternate saying things
   c. reflecting - encouraging your child's attempt to communicate by repeating them back to him/her
   d. expanding - reflecting back what your child says and adding words to it to encourage new concepts or more elaborate sentence structure
   e. self-talk - talking about what you are doing, thinking, or feeling
   f. parallel talk - talking about what you are doing, thinking, or feeling.

5. Environmental strategies for encouraging communication involve arranging the setting or materials you and your child are using to make it more likely that your child will need to or want to communicate. Some of these strategies are:

   a. forgetfulness - purposefully "forgetting" to provide everything that is needed for an activity
   b. visible by unreachable - placing an object that your child needs or wants out of his reach, but still within sight

c. violate expectations or sabotage - doing something silly, such as put a doll's shoe on your child's foot, or interfering with an activity
d. piece by piece - holding back pieces of toys or foods to encourage your child to ask for them

6. Incidental teaching involves setting up the environment then following these steps to prompt the appropriate communication.

   a. Set up the environment
   b. Wait 5 seconds with an expectant expression on your face
   c. If your child does not respond, ask a question or make an open-ended statement
   d. If your child does not respond, repeat or rephrase
   e. If your child does not respond, tell him/her what to say.
   f. If your child does not respond, say the appropriate response and give the desired object.

THE LEAP OUTREACH PROJECT